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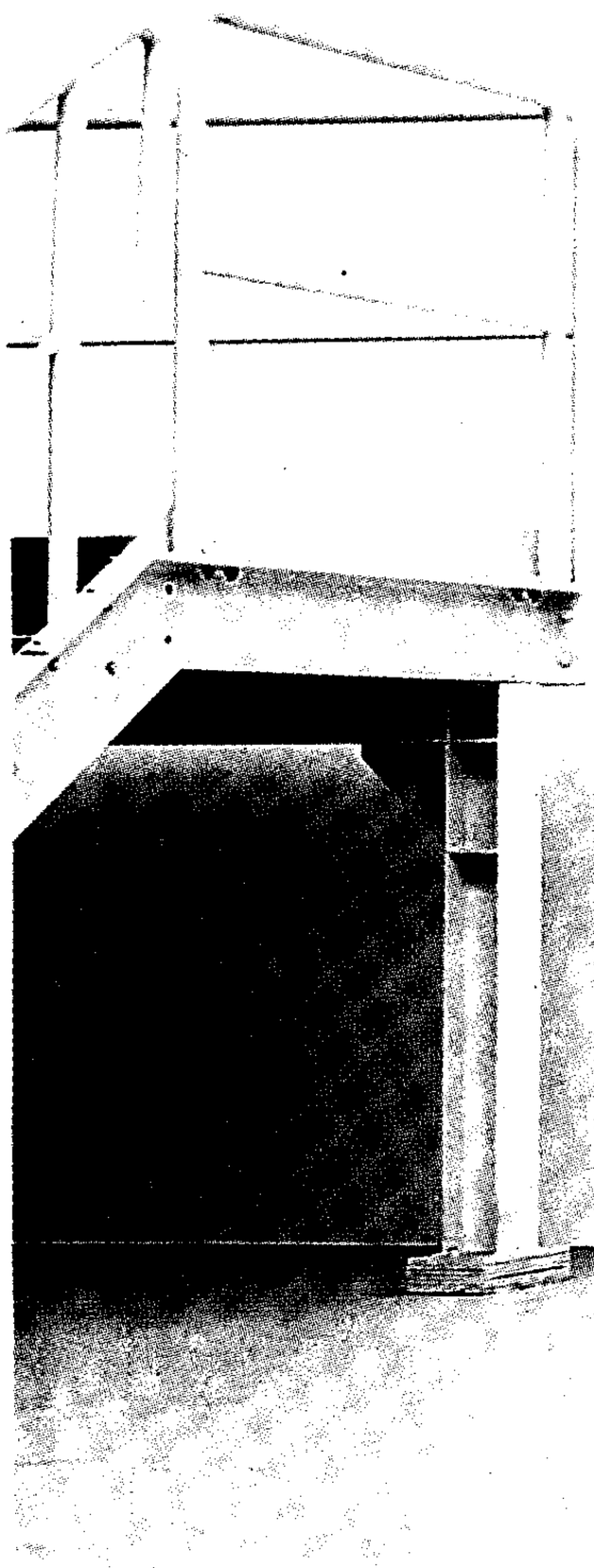

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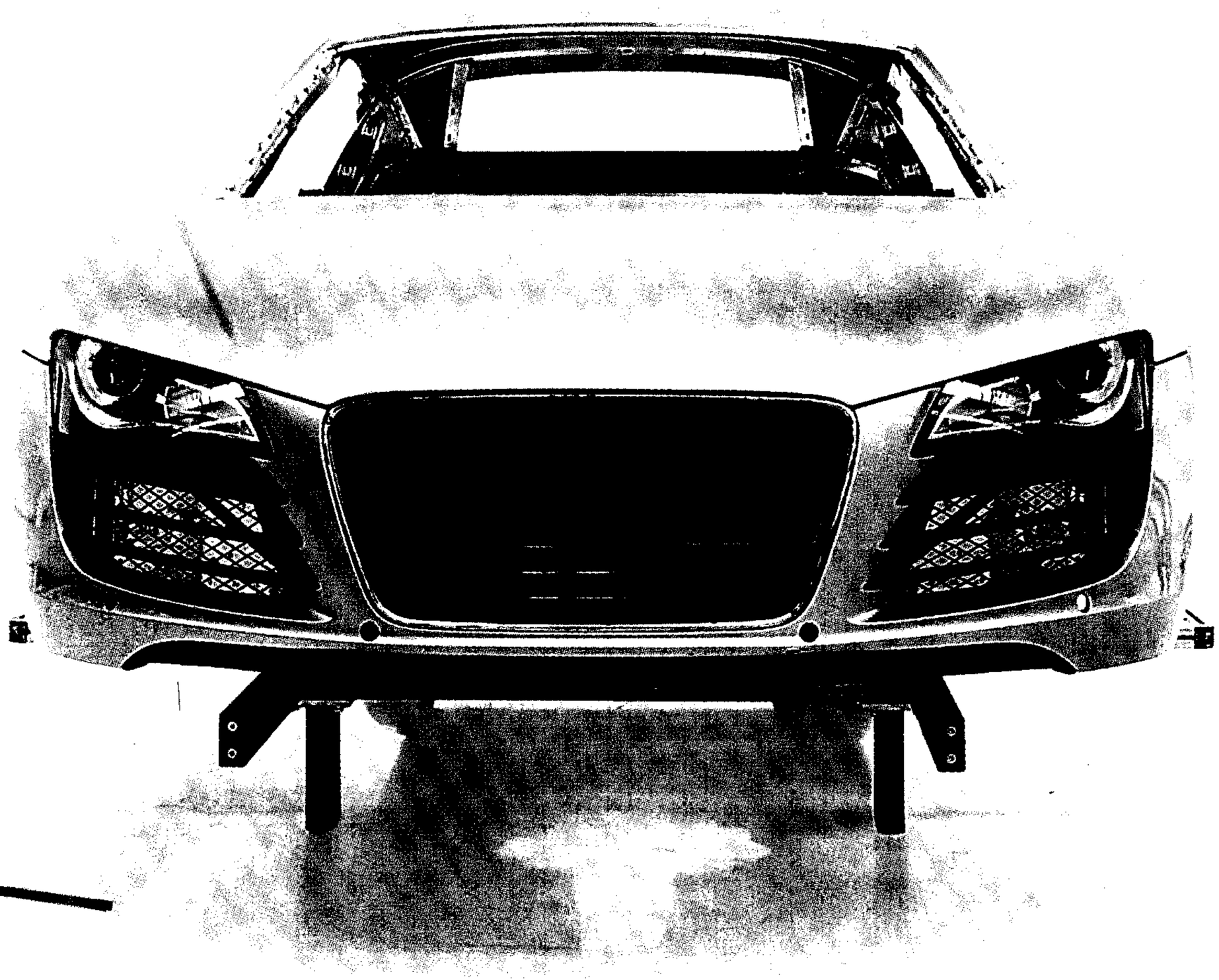

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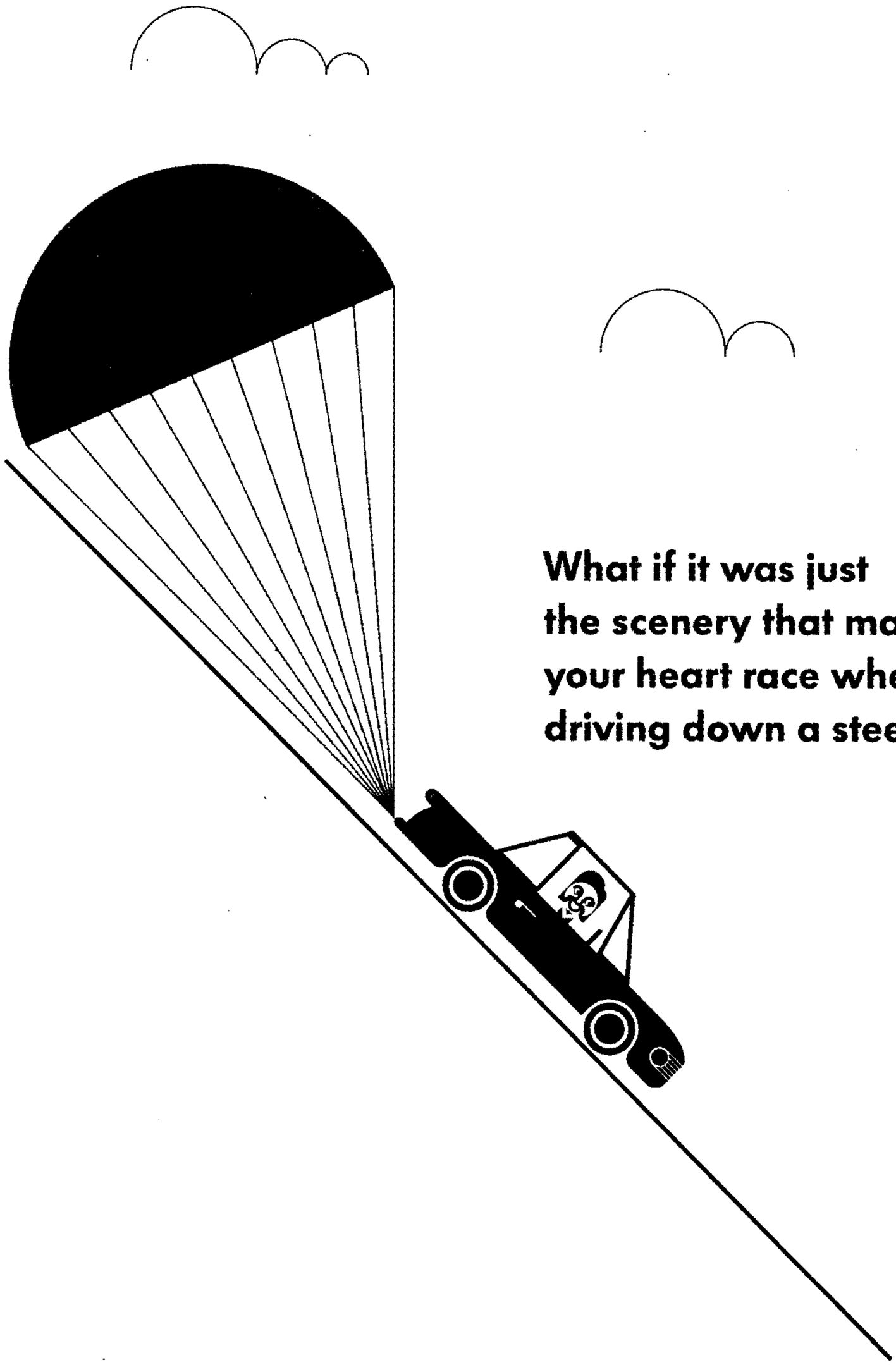

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Brown Christmas

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WERE THEY BY ANY CHANCE RELATED?

"For some months, the *Eye* has chronicled Conrad Black's eccentric attempts to turn himself into the new Cap'n Bob..." – *Private Eye*, 1992.

"To think that the comparison is real you have to believe that there is some chance that we – or I in particular – are sitting here doing things that would lead straight to jail. I hate to say it, but Bob Maxwell did, or appears to have done so. Nobody that I have seen has even suggested that there is anything questionable about the ethics of the management of the *Telegraph*. What can I do? Bob Maxwell was stealing other people's money. What's it got to do with me? I didn't vouch for him... I am not a self-righteous person and I have my detractors, but my treatment of minority shareholders and my financial ethics have never been questioned. It is demonstrably an unfair comparison." – Conrad Black, 1992.

READERS!
THE NEXT ISSUE OF PRIVATE EYE WILL BE ON SALE WEDNESDAY JANUARY 9TH 2008

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ABC

IT WAS "the ultimate fun Christmas card that celebrates the joy of the Nativity story" – a tableau of *Sun* columnists gathered round Jesus in his manger.

Verily, as it is told in the scriptures, Beardie Blunkett was a shepherd, Trevor Kavanagh a wise man, Jane "Glenda" Moore an implausible angel and Kelvin MacKenzie an all-too-plausible ass. Packs of six could be bought for £4.50, with profits going to the *Sun*'s "Help For Heroes" campaign.

The paper described the photo as a "perfect antidote to all those killjoys who try to downgrade Christmas by calling it Winterval". But a DVD of the scene, which it also planned to sell as a fund-raiser, fell victim to the killjoyishness of weirdo editor Rebekah Wade. After watching it she became quite hysterical and ordered every copy destroyed. The DVD was, she warned, so offensive that it would "sink the paper".

A typical scene featured *Sun* executive editor Fergus Shanahan, as Joseph, pretending to "shag" the Virgin Mary (Lorraine Kelly) while the donkey-suited Kelvin MacKenzie frolicked about on all fours, braying "If that's a story my prick's a bloater!"

IT WAS a not very "Happy Christmas" to the disabled from Ann McGuire, minister for disabled people, when she launched the annual report of the government's new Office for Disability Issues.

This outfit is dedicated to "improving life chances for disabled people"; and McGuire said it helped break with the past, when disabled people were "almost invisible".

How odd then that the 8,900-word report contained not a single mention of Remploy, the government-owned firm founded by Labour in 1944 to create work opportunities for people with disabilities and which employs more than 7,000 people in its workshops.

Why the "invisibility"? Surely not because New Labour Scrooges are trying to shut the workshops down.

Peter Hain, Work and Pensions Secretary, was applauded at the Labour conference this year when he appeared to suspend a Remploy board plan to close 43 of its 83 factories ("No factory closures will take place without the agreement of government ministers," he declared). But with Hain's agreement 28 of them are now to close.

Hain's decision provoked fury among Remploy staff and union reps, but it seems to have met total indifference from the so-called Office for Disability Issues.

TO THE Grosvenor House Hotel earlier this month for the British Computer Society's gala awards dinner.

Biggest laugh of the night, a fortnight after the disappearance of 25m people's details on two lost discs, came with the announcement of the finalists for "public sector organisation of the year".

Among the contenders narrowly pipped to the top spot by Rotherham council was... Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs!

NOT content with puffing ID cards in his *Sun* column, David Blunkett is now pursuing his obsession through the letters page of the *Times*, dismissing suggestions that last month's missing-discs fiasco might weaken the case for an identity database.

Yet again Blunkett omits to mention that he is chairman of the international advisory committee of Entrust Inc, the Texas-based security company which hopes to provide software for the British ID card system. Buck up, Beardie! If you start declaring your interest, we shan't have to keep doing it for you...

DESPITE having to write off £500m in September and £800m in October, and being unable to guarantee there won't be further write-offs in the next few months, bosses at Barclays Capital clearly feel they have something to celebrate.

Thus it was that CEO Bob Diamond threw a lavish fantasy-themed Christmas party for his wheeler-dealers in a giant marquee just by the Houses of Parliament. Those who have lost or are in real danger of losing their properties, thanks to the clever packaging and trading of their mortgages by the likes of Barclays Capital, might be interested to learn how much the beano cost: a modest £600,000.

UK'S BASRA TRIUMPH

NUMBER CRUNCHING

4,500 British troops left in Iraq

10,000 British private security company employees left in Iraq

Street of Shame

BAH, HUMBUG

IN EARLY December, Healey Primary School in Rochdale sent a note home to parents of 4 to 7-year-old pupils: "Please could parents send just one Christmas card to the whole class rather than asking school for a whole class name list. This is to avoid tears and tantrums which often occur when Christmas cards are distributed."

When an outraged parent contacted the *Rochdale Observer* claiming that this was "political correctness gone mad", her comments were promptly reported beneath the headline: "School bans Christmas Cards".

A spokeswoman hastened to point out that cards were "in no way banned" from the school, which was currently preparing for no fewer than three festive productions and a carol service. "The cost of so many cards is prohibitive for some families and we feel that children are often pressurised to act in the same way as their peers," she explained. "In addition, some children are missed out and feel very upset when this happens."

How was this reported when it reached the national press the following week? "Furious parents and campaigners last night slammed the politically correct brigade for spoiling the true meaning of Christmas," roared the *Express*. "Festive cards are being banned in schools... the season of goodwill is being ruined by Scrooge-like officials fearful of offending other faiths or worried about health and safety rules." Its sister paper the *Daily Star*, meanwhile, kept up its own tradition of ignoring all the facts with the front-page headline: "Ban on Christmas cards in case they upset Muslims!"

AS HE leaves Fleet Street for the more wholesome world of Westminster lobbying, *Sunday Times* political editor David "Crackers" Cracknell has been musing on his biggest scoop.

"It's not really one big story I'm proud of, more the fact I got hold of a series of leaks," he tells *Public Affairs News*. "These leaks were from sources formed from traditional journalistic endeavour."

A curious way of putting it. As *Eye* readers will recall, most of Crackers's leaked documents came from Claire Newell, a young *Sunday Times* intern who inveigled her way into a job at the Cabinet Office. When she was finally rumbled as the mole – and rewarded with a full-time post back at the *Sunday Times* – poor Crackers really did have to fall back on traditional journalistic endeavour.

With mixed results. Who can forget last year's sensational scoop in which he revealed that "Alastair Campbell has put off publishing his memoirs... until Gordon Brown has left office after his expected spell as prime minister"? Luckily for him, the interviewer from *Public Affairs News* was too polite to mention it.

OUTGOING *Observer* editor Roger "Mellie" Alton displays an unsuspected talent for drama criticism after watching *Othello* at the Donmar Warehouse.

"I started asking myself questions," he reveals to readers who subscribe to his weekly email newsletter. "First, why is Iago such a f***ing bastard?... Second, why is Othello such a twat?"

SOMEONE ASKS THE HOME SECRETARY WHAT THE TIME IS

AMID the gleeful three pages the *Daily Telegraph* devoted to the imprisonment of its former proprietor Lord B lack for criminal fraud and obstructing justice, the paper did find room for one still small voice of calm – and a well-qualified one at that.

"Jonathan Aitken, the former Tory cabinet minister who served a jail term for perjury, said he considered the sentence far too long," the paper reported. "'These offences would carry a lower tariff in the United Kingdom and Europe. If I had been on the jury I would have voted to acquit him anyway'."

Alas for Black, Aitken has two more years to go before – providing he manages to keep his nose clean in the meantime – he will be legally allowed to do jury service for anyone, the tenth anniversary of his release from Standford Hill prison not occurring until January 2010.

MODESTY BLAZE

"What the authorities have to look at is their policy of excluding those in the media from serving on the board of the ECB. That is wrong. The biggest names in English cricket – Sir Ian Botham, David Gower and myself – would love to help the game. People like Mark Nicholas, Derek Pringle and Mike Selvey may not have had as great Test records but they have very sound cricket brains..."

– **Geoffrey Boycott**, *Daily Telegraph*.

***DAILY MAIL* readers for whom Allison Pearson was "away" last Wednesday must have been rather surprised to see their columnist very much in presence the following evening on BBC1's *Question Time*.**

As was Paul Dacre, who went ballistic on hearing that Pearson would not be filing. "It was never like this with Lynda [Lee-Potter]," he bellowed at staff. "She was in the office at dawn every morning and stayed until her pages had gone late at night. And she never missed a column."

O·B·N

Mr Balls is phenomenally bright – he talks quickly, absorbing ideas as rapidly as he pours them out. A 20-minute coffee with him is more rewarding than a two-hour lunch with most ministers.

RACHEL SYLVESTER
Daily Telegraph
Submitted by Barry McCanna

LETTERS from Prince Philip "which led Princess Diana to fear for her life" had "sensationally gone missing", reported a breathless *Daily Express* on 6 March.

The letters were central to Mohamed Fayed's case that the Princess was murdered in a plot involving the Duke of Edinburgh. In October, the paper reported that Prince Philip accepted sending the letters but denied they were threatening and insisted he never branded Diana "a trollop and a harlot" in them. Whoever said he had? Only one Simone Simmons, an "energy healer" whose claims in a book on her friendship with the princess the *Express* had urged be treated with "the contempt they deserve".

On 8 December, the *Express* predicted tough questions at Diana's inquest for Prince Philip's private secretary, Brigadier Sir Miles Hunt-Davis, over the "highly sensitive correspondence" that would show "Philip's hostility towards Diana and his motive for murder".

Sir Miles went one better, supplying carbon copies of every letter Prince Philip sent to Diana between 1990 and her death, as well as her original, hand-written replies. And what evidence of sensational threats did they contain? Er, diddly-squat. These were the letters from "Dear Pa" which filled last week's front pages, with their promises to "do my utmost to help you and Charles to the best of my ability", talk of "fondest love" and Diana's belief that the Duke had "proved to me, if I did not already know it, that you really do care".

That damning evidence just keeps on mounting up, doesn't it? Naturally, the following day's *Express* reported this exchange beneath the headline, "Did Philip Want Diana Dead?"

MAKING his debut last month as the *Sun*'s Bizarre editor – sorry, "Prime Minister of Showbiz" – the moronic Gordon Smart was keen to introduce readers to "my cabinet".

This included "my cheeky Scouse deputy Danielle Lawler" who had been promoted along with him. "Made her name when Everton's Wayne Rooney pinched her bum in a Liverpool club. Loves footie and an ale," he noted.

What she does not appear to have loved was working for Gordon. Just two weeks after her promotion – a fortnight which saw the launch of the "Ladvent Calendar", the exhumation of several ancient pictures of what Smart called Jordan's "mega-bangers", the printing of a photograph Paris Hilton's crotch snapped by shoving a camera up her skirt and a lengthy peroration on the order in which Smart would prefer to have sex with the members of Girls Aloud – Lawler departed the *Sun* to become the new 3am columnist for the *Mirror*.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The *Sun* simply calls him [John Darwin] 'Canoe Man'...These appellations are **a little insulting to the reader.** They assume we cannot keep pace with this fast-changing story and must be continually reminded that we are reading about the canoe guy...We don't normally label missing people according to their last known mode of transport."

– Tim Dowling, *Guardian*, 10 December.

"Canoe Man Remanded."

– *Guardian*, 11 December.

"IS THE Tory deputy chairman ashamed to say he lives here?" asks *Daily Telegraph* political commentator Rachel Sylvester, attacking political donors such as Lord Ashcroft who spends much of his time in Belize and is less than transparent about his tax affairs.

"If Lord Ashcroft is indeed resident in this country, then he should say so openly. I do not know many people who are ashamed to say they live here. There really is no good reason for bashfulness."

Could she by any chance be referring to her own proprietors, the weirdo Barclay twins, who live in the offshore tax haven of Brecqhou in the Channel Islands – and are obsessively bashful about their own financial affairs and their privacy?

THE *Observer*'s media section carried a *detailed account* of the departure of *Times* editor Robert Thomson, pointing out that he went "out of his way to heap praise on his able deputy Ben Preston, comments which were greeted with a huge round of applause on the editorial floor."

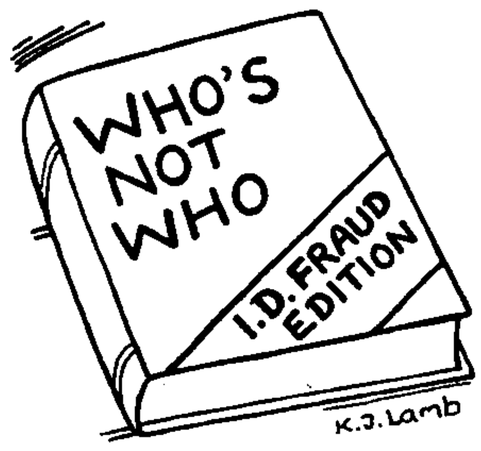
"Preston is credited with running the paper on a day-to-day basis and remains a hugely popular and highly regarded figure internally," it noted. "Some had thought he might be appointed editor instead of James Harding."

Just over the page from this fulsome tribute to the bloke who didn't get the job was the latest missive from the *Observer*'s regular media columnist, Peter Preston – or as Ben Preston calls him, Dad.

THE launch of Carol Liebau's book *Prude: How The Sex-Obsessed Culture Damages Girls* gave picture editors a field day.

Liebau may think constant exposure to "sexiness, revealing fashions and the overvaluing of physical appeal" is bad for girls, but that didn't stop the *Daily Mail* from peppering its coverage of her book with photos of Sharon Stone, Britney Spears and Paris Hilton.

While the *Observer* also helped girls' aspirations along with an image of Paris Hilton in a mini-dress, the *Telegraph* couldn't resist illustrating "promiscuity and sexual aggression" with a snap of Christina Aguilera in a revealing frock and, er, nice demure girls with Rachel Weisz (the actress who posed for *Esquire* wearing only a snake) in a white blouse.



DUMB BRITON

QUESTIONED by the foreign affairs select committee about Vladmir Putin's threat to close all British Council offices in Russia outside Moscow, Foreign Secretary David Miliband replied more in sorrow than in anger.

"I think it's a very sad fact, but I have to point it out, that there are two countries in which the council is not allowed to operate," he lamented. "That is Burma and Iran. I very much hope that the announcement today from the Russian government does not signal that they are taking steps down that road, because that is deeply unwholesome company in which to be."

This must have come as a considerable surprise to the British Council's staff in Burma and Iran. The Tehran office is particularly proud of the 45 joint research projects it supports between British and Iranian universities, and recently hosted an environmental conference in the city of Ramsar. The Burmese office, meanwhile, boasts that "each day about 1,200 visitors come to our Rangoon centre to make use of our facilities to help them develop their knowledge and skills".

SWEET F.A.

THE search for a new England football manager revealed that sports hacks were even more clueless than the players and coach who failed to qualify for Euro 2008. With new man Fabio Capello now installed, the *Eye* is happy to offer the Italian an introduction to the fumbling guesswork that is the daily grind of E.I. Addio.

23 September: Current boss Steve McClaren is still two months away from the sack but the *Observer* already has a successor lined up. "Jose **Mourinho** would become **England** manager if the Football Association was to ask him to replace Steve McClaren," writes Duncan Castles in a front-page scoop.

25 November: With McClaren gone, Castles returns to a familiar theme in the *Observer*. "Jose Mourinho would find it hard to resist a serious offer to become England's new coach." The *Mail on Sunday* has a different exclusive: "Jurgen Klinsmann is ready to become the new England coach. The German, 43, is now the top candidate to replace Steve McClaren."

7 December: The *Sun* confirms that its campaign to have Mourinho installed is about to pay off: "The ex-Chelsea manager was last night said to be 100 percent up for making a spectacular return to the UK to take on the biggest job in world sport. He flew in by private jet under a cloak of secrecy to meet FA chief Brian Barwick and thrash out a £6m-a-year deal to see him become the nation's football saviour. The Portuguese coach, 44, has told FA bosses he is prepared to take the helm and give up on the idea of taking the reins at a top European club like AC Milan or Real Madrid. When the *Sun* confronted Barwick last night about Mourinho's arrival he bizarrely stared into space and refused to utter a word."

8 December: No wonder Barwick was dumbfounded. Mourinho, it emerges, had never left his Portugal villa. But the *Sun* is undeterred. "Smiling Jose **Mourinho** last night hinted that he is on the brink of becoming **England**'s new manager. Asked if he was about to take on world football's biggest job, the Special One grinned, shrugged and replied: 'Why not?' It is the clearest indication yet that the ex-Chelsea chief will take the hotseat."

9 December: Taking its cue from the *Sun*, the *Mail on Sunday* refuses to be put off the Mourinho trail, claiming that, as of the weekend, "**Mourinho's** friends certainly believed he was in the process of agreeing final terms with **England**." The *Observer*'s Duncan Castles piles in: "Though the FA initially suspected that **Mourinho** was exaggerating his interest in the England position to leverage an offer from a Spanish or Italian club, Barwick and other FA board members have been reassured that his interest is genuine and strong."

10 December: It is confirmed that Mourinho will turn down the England position in favour of a club job on the continent. Still, you can't fault the *Sun* for blind loyalty to the cause: "The FA are not giving up on Jose **Mourinho**. Despite indications over the weekend that **Mourinho** had ruled himself out of the **England** running, the FA want to hear that for themselves. They are inviting **Mourinho** to fly back to London this week for formal discussions about replacing Steve McClaren."

11 December: A day is clearly a long time in football, as the *Sun* performs the traditional reverse-ferret and delivers its "Big Exclusive": "Fabio Capello will meet FA chiefs for talks in the next 48 hours. And the Italian will be told he can have the job if he shows he is the right man to manage **England.**" Three days later, the appointment is duly confirmed. Buon giornio, Fabio!

THE SON WOT WON IT

JOHN WITHEROW hasn't survived as editor of the *Sunday Times* for 14 years without knowing how to ingratiate himself with the Murdoch family.

Thus when James Murdoch was promoted from Sky to head his father's business interests in Europe and popped in on a Saturday to see the paper put together, something had to be done to keep the new boss on side.

Sure enough, a feature hailing James Murdoch's ascent within the family business was hastily inserted into the *Sunday Times* business section at the eleventh hour.

It fell to hack James Ashton to provide the necessary hymn of praise: "He was determined to broaden Sky's appeal… his strategy has been proved right… He takes with him an understanding of the role of print in founding his father's empire and a valuable expertise in digital developments. He was one of the first internet evangelists at the top of News Corp, urging Rupert Murdoch to invest in the social networking website MySpace."

In fact Murdoch jnr's interest in the web predates the acquisition of MySpace. James was drawn into dotcom boom at the end of the 1990s when he urged his dad to spend $450m on an internet business called Pointcast. Fortunately the deal fell through – the company was sold a year later for $7m. One News Corp deal that did go through was the acquisition of WebMD, a web site for doctors and patients. WebMD sucked up hundreds of millions of dollars of investment but with little profit to show at the end. Strangely, this instance of the Murdoch Midas touch did not make Ashton's report.

The *Sun* too was keen to impress the new boss; and almost half last Saturday's front page was given over to the headline "It's Showtime", hyping three of the weekend's big events: Liverpool v Man Utd and Arsenal v Chelsea (both screened by Sky Sport) and the final of *The X-Factor*.

The Murdochs have more than a passing interest in *X-Factor*. It is an ITV show and BSkyB owns a 17.9 percent shareholding in ITV. BSkyB may soon be forced to sell some of those shares, which are down a third in value from when Murdoch jnr bought them – and a good ratings performance from *The X-Factor* wouldn't harm ITV's share price, would it?

"Have you got the luxury watches supplement?"

HIGH PRINCIPALS

WALSALL COLLEGE's announcement that principal Chris Ball has left "to pursue other interests" came as little surprise to staff, since their former boss has spent the past several months on paid leave.

Ball vanished suddenly from college life in July, along with director of finance Les Burns. Governors refused to say what was going on other than that both were on authorised leave (*Eye* 1189), and the college remains tight-lipped about the reasons for Ball's departure.

The move followed a year in which the college was investigated by the National Audit Office over the use of an expensive consultant to organise job cuts. The *Eye* has since learned that said consultant – Simon Graham of CSM Consulting – had shared business interests with Burns. Burns's resigned company directorships include the position of company secretary to an education firm called Different Dimension, which at one time gave its business address as Simon Graham's home address in Durham.

SECRET SANTA SPECIAL

THERE wasn't much cash for Education Secretary Ed Balls' grand plan for children last week, which might be related to the amounts pocketed each year by favoured consultants.

Back in 2002 Education Secretary Estelle Morris declared herself a "very dissatisfied customer" after the Capita-run Criminal Records Bureau's inability to vet teachers delayed the opening of many schools. The fiasco came soon after the firm had screwed up Individual Learning Accounts, too. But Morris's successors haven't taken government business elsewhere.

A parliamentary question from Lib Dem shadow education secretary David Laws reveals that in 2004/05 Crapita was paid £207m and in 2005/06 £199m by what is now the Department for Children, Schools and Families, including for its expertise in running the key stage 3 (ages 11-14) national strategy.

Crapita's enduring popularity can't of course be related the £1m loan given by its then chairman Rod Aldridge to the Labour party not long after his firm's incompetence had been exposed.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£200m Amount to be spent on playgrounds over the next three years

£200m Amount paid to Capita out of education budget every year

ONE of the few senior Labour figures to emerge with any credit in the "dodgy donors" affair is veteran local government leader and Labour national executive committee (NEC) member Sir Jeremy Beecham.

For years Beecham has battled against entrenched interests on Newcastle city council and warned of the danger of Tammany Hall politics. It was Beecham who advised anyone who would listen that David Abrahams was not only eccentric, but someone to be avoided at all costs – especially if he came waving a chequebook (or, as it turned out, having others wave his chequebook for him). But then Beecham has a long memory.

David Abrahams' father Bennie was a Newcastle Labour councillor and lord mayor during the 1960s and 70s. He was also a property developer and good friend of the legendary T Dan Smith who, with business partner John Poulson, presided over one of the most corrupt periods in English local government. Bennie made his money through his large property portfolio, thoughtfully leaving it all to his son David.

Beecham's memories of the mafia-style corruption of north-east politics also led him to speak out against Derek Hatton – and his militant mafiosi – who controlled Liverpool in the early 1980s, earning him the undying hatred of the ultra left and the Labour hard right.

HARRIET Harman's hapless husband Jack Dromey has been hauled over the coals at an executive meeting of the Transport & General Workers' Union section of the new mega union Unite for not knowing about David Abrahams' methods of donating large dollops of cash to Labour.

One of the Brothers remarked that it was clear that "Jack has been kept in the dark and cannot really be blamed, for as treasurer of the Labour party, Jack is either privy to knowing what is going on, or is a cretin".

CALLED TO ORDURE

WHEN Ricky Hatton's blood man has patched up the boxer's face he might like to apply swabs and Vaseline to civil servants caught up in the privatisation of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

DERA, now called QinetiQ, was the Ministry of Defence unit which came up with whizzy new weapons – think of "Q" in the James Bond films. Regular *Eye* readers will recall that a large slice of QinetiQ was sold in 2003 at a low price to US venture capitalists Carlyle (advisory board member: Sir John Major). Some staff have since made millions from shares. Meanwhile, Americans now have oversight of much of Britain's defence know-how.

MPs got stuck in to the scandal at a recent hearing of the public accounts committee. A bloody little event, it proved. QinetiQ and the MoD were not only made to look incompetent and greedy. They were told the sale "stank".

Bill Jeffrey, top civil servant at the MoD, was the first witness to speak and tried some management waffle about QinetiQ's need for "strategic partners" in 2003 and how best to "grow the value of the business". The verb "grow", when used transitively for anything but crops, is generally a strong indicator of bullshit.

Committee chairman Edward Leigh (Con, Gainsborough), soon bit off Jeffrey's head, telling him the MoD "got into bed too quickly" with Carlyle. In some ways this was hard on Jeffrey, who was not running the MoD at the time, but his resentful performance suggested Whitehall still doesn't think it did much wrong in the QinetiQ sale.

MPs heard how Carlyle bid for the QinetiQ stake after proposing a juicy share incentive scheme for staff. Jeffrey admitted that this scheme had been left to Carlyle to arrange. "They are the experts in incentivising," he said. You say that again, mate.

Jeffrey added: "These incentivisation schemes are a key element of what companies like Carlyle bring to the party." No wonder civil servants were so glad to push through the low sale to Carlyle. But how does this incentivisation-led approach serve the national interest?

Ex-Defence Minister Lord Gilbert recently said that DERA's chief executive, Sir John Chisholm, "never once in my presence indicated that he might have a conflict of interest or was going to be privately enriched by what was going on". Chisholm invested some £100,000 in QinetiQ. He now has £25m. Kerr-ching!

Leigh asked him about this astounding return on his money. "Nobody from outside can understand it," said Leigh. "Do you have any sense of shame?"

Chisholm suavely said that QinetiQ's profits had been "a great achievement by the team". He said he and fellow investors had taken a "considerable risk". Don Touhig (Lab, Islwyn) thought otherwise. He called it "the unacceptable face of greed". Chisholm, with all the blandness of a multi-millionaire: "I do not accept that."

Touhig, noting that Chisholm supported Carlyle's bid, said that once the deal was done QinetiQ agreed to reimburse Carlyle its bid fees – which allegedly came to a stonking £16m. "Is it not a case of your scratching their back and they scratch yours?" asked Touhig. "Some people would suggest that was tinged with corruption," Touhig told Jeffrey. "It stinks to high heaven."

Geraldine Smith (Lab, Morecambe) thought the £16m "an awful lot of money to prepare a bid". Jeffrey was "sure the costs were properly audited" but was "not familiar with the process that was gone through".

Smith was irked by this airy answer. She said it looked like there was "a cosy little relationship" between Carlyle and senior QinetiQ staff before the sale. She also noted that the MoD paid £28m on consultants before the sale. "Can you tell me what the taxpayer got for that £28m?" she asked. Jeffrey: "A range of advice." But this did not include "separate specific advice" on the incentive scheme for senior managers.

By now Jeffrey was whimpering *and Tory* MP Richard Bacon (S. Norfolk) had to get him to repeat answers "because you are not speaking that loudly". Jeffrey admitted that there was no safeguard to stop senior officials from getting mega rich from the sale.

Now it was the turn of the MoD's Trevor Woolley to be beaten up, leading to an exchange which deserves to enter any Whitehall book of quotations.

Bacon: "Mr Woolley, are you a chartered accountant?"

Woolley: "I am not."

Bacon: "Are you a qualified financial person of any kind? Do you have any financial qualifications?"

Woolley: "I do not have financial qualifications."

Bacon: "What is your job?"

Woolley: "I am the finance director of the Ministry of Defence."

'Gavel Basher'

MEANWHILE one of Labour's donors may be alone in thinking a signed copy of Alastair Campbell's diaries is worth £60,000.

Figures from the Electoral Commission show that Amin Hemani, a businessman known more widely as Joe Hemani, gave Labour £59,000 in July by buying a copy of the diaries for £60,000 in a fundraising auction at Gordon Brown's inaugural Wembley Stadium party. Labour has to register purchases at fundraising auctions as donations, but it can take off the cost of the goods bought – in this case a steepish valuation of £1,000.

Interestingly, Joe Hemani owns a Reading-based computer sales company called Westcoast. Hemani's massive bid for the diaries surprised many at the Wembley event, but Hemani may have been feeling flush thanks to a recent business success: days earlier the Ministry of Defence had announced that Westcoast was part of a winning consortium on the £132m contract to provide the MoD with office supplies.

Hemani may already be a multi-millionaire, but the MoD deal represents a significant move into government contracting – cause for rejoicing all round, it seems.

"Apparently, he's never accepted any dodgy donations"

● One of the figures in Number Crunching on page 8 of the last issue was incorrect. It should have read:

£2,700,000 Donations legally received by Conservative party from Michael Ashcroft, a businessman based in Belize

YET another party-funding mystery for those who enjoy a good whodunit over Christmas: how much has spread-betting tycoon Stuart Wheeler given the Conservatives?

Here's what Tory treasurer Lord Ashcroft writes in his book *Dirty Politics, Dirty Times*: "Just when I needed a stroke of luck in the New Year of 2001, I received it. Stuart Wheeler, a businessman and a known Euro-sceptic, came forward with a donation of £5 million. It was the largest single donation ever given to a political party and it came completely out of the blue."

The register of donations to political parties, operated by the Electoral Commission, also came into effect at the very beginning of 2001, and from then on parties were obliged to register all donations. But where is Wheeler's "largest single donation ever given to a political party"? The record shows that he gave £2,450,000 to the Conservative party in 2001, which was registered on 3 May that year. A month later – days after the 2001 general election – the late Sir Paul Getty gave the party £5m.

According to the register, the *total* amount given to the Tories by Wheeler between the start of registration in January 2001 and the third quarter of 2007 is a little over £3.8m. So what happened to the £5m? Was Ashcroft mistaken about the amount? Did he exaggerate it in the hope of persuading Getty to give a matching sum? Or did he collect £5m from Wheeler but then forget to register it fully, through an administrative oversight?

Wheeler himself remains under the impression that he did donate £5m, to judge by the advert for a talk he gave in October to the right-wing Freedom Association. "Stuart will speak in a personal capacity and will include his views on state funding of political parties," it announced. "In 2001 he donated £5m to the Conservative Party." So where did it go? Perhaps Knacker of the Yard would care to investigate.

MORE mud-slinging among the warring factions of George Galloway's former Respect party – this time over a mysterious foreign donation.

Galloway alerted the Electoral Commission last month about a cheque received in January for $10,000, apparently from Khansaheb Civil Engineering, a Dubai construction firm 45 percent owned by Interserve plc, the private finance outfit headed by the Tory peer Lord Blackwell and involved in British school and hospital PFIs.

The cheque was sent with a letter from an unnamed Khansaheb executive who claimed to be a Galloway fan. Galloway was under investigation at the time by the parliamentary commissioner for standards and feared it was a sting by an undercover hack. He told staff to return it, suggesting the donor send a cheque to the Stop the War coalition instead.

When Respect national secretary John Rees returned the cheque on 23 January, however, he suggested the money be sent instead to another Respect-backed project, Organising for Fighting Unions (Offu), based in Respeck's Bethnal Green HQ. A new Khansaheb cheque for $10,000 was duly issued, some of which was used to pay an Offu debt of £5,000.

Since then, Respeck has imploded (*Eye* 1197) with Galloway's final words to Rees and his SWP cadres last month ("Go on, fuck off! Fuck off the lot of you!") seemingly leaving little room for comradely rapprochement. Galloway told the local *East London Advertiser* last week that when he found out the Dubai donation had been used to pay Offu's debts he urged Rees to call in the Electoral Commission, but Rees had not done so, a fact that contributed to the split.

Rees, who denies wrongdoing, said: "Mr Galloway knew about this all along. He knew that we had suggested an alternative destination for the cheque. He had said Stop the War Coalition, we said Offu. [*Shurely "Fuck off you?" – Ed*] Mr Galloway is now raising this to discredit his opponents."

Oh, comrades!

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WITH the rest of Europe distracted by the row over the EU reform treaty, a coven of EU justice ministers, including our own Jack Straw, has pulled a fast one over something called the Prüm treaty.

Britain declined to sign up to this legally-binding convention when it was tabled by the Germans back in 2005 because it allows police officers to pursue fleeing villains across borders – something likely to cause tabloid apoplexy. But Prüm offers so much more than Eurocop snatch squads. It also requires member states to open police databases to officers from other countries, and allows them to invite in foreign police teams, including armed officers.

This was simply too good an opportunity to miss for Whitehall's wagers of the war on terror. So, instead of ditching the German ideas, they simply signed up to a parallel binding decision that replicates Prüm, except for the hot pursuit bit.

It's a fait accompli

Britain must thus set up a system to allow other member states to search its databases of UK citizens' DNA samples (reckoned to be the largest in the world), fingerprints and vehicle registration details. It is also required to provide personal data files even where there is only "reason to believe that the data subjects will commit criminal offences". Armed squads of foreign officers invited into the UK, meanwhile, will in certain circumstances be able to use firearms "for purposes going beyond" self-defence or protection of others.

In signing up to Prüm Mark II, Straw ignored House of Lords reservations raised earlier this year, which noted that Britain's threshold for holding DNA profiles is "far lower than any other member state". The British DNA "crime" database includes samples from persons arrested but not charged, crime scenes and children. This information can now be transferred across the EU, and potentially, on to non-EU states.

The Lords also asked that "at the very least" agencies putting Prüm in place should submit annual reports on the use of their new powers. This has been ignored. Cost concerns have also been over-ridden. The Lords pointed out that a decision of this nature, which originates from the EU Council rather than from the European Commission, is not obliged to include an impact assessment or cost estimates. The government has said it will cost £31m to set up the Prüm-style systems, but has not said what running costs will be.

THE EU's bullying of dissenters has spread to the European parliament where MEPs refused to let protesters have their say against the signing of the Charter of Fundamental Rights" last week.

President of the parliament, Hans-Gert Poettering, refused to let protesters speak and shouted that they were "anti-democratic" while one of his henchmen reportedly dragged a woman from the chamber for taking photos.

He must have forgotten the words he himself uttered in a speech he made in Lisbon on 8 December when he referred to "Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights" which "mentions the inviolable dignity of the individual" and extolled European values of freedom and equal rights which "we practise every day".

However, it was the German Christian Democrat Herr Poettering, who represents the EP's largest EPP group, who threatened MEPs Chris Heaton-Harris, David Sumberg, Daniel Hannan and Martin Callanan with "very serious consequences" in 2005 if they did not support his strong federalist views and later suspended MEP Roger Helmer for daring to criticise his leadership during a censure debate. So much for the individual's freedom to express himself or herself.

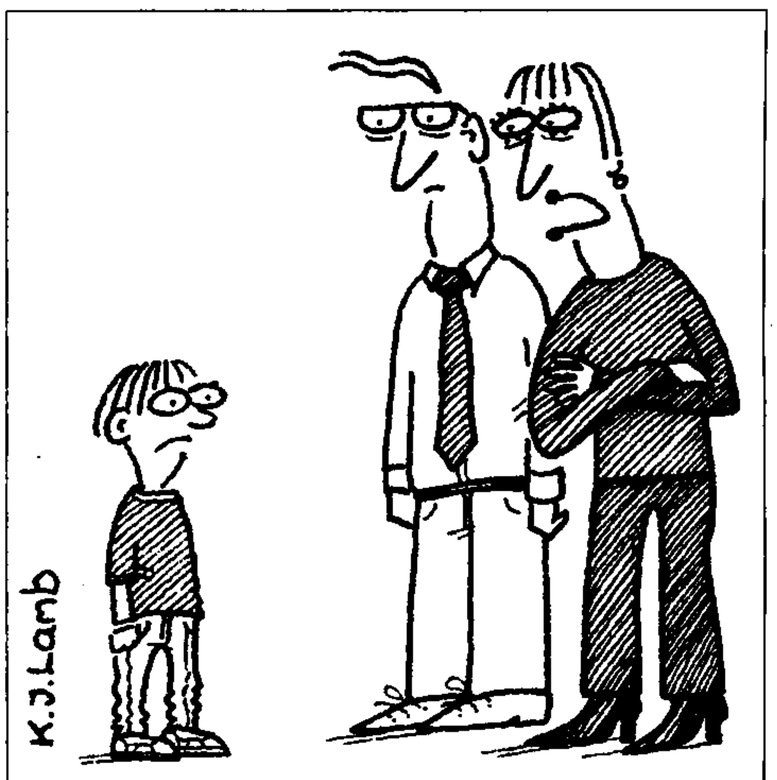
JOINED-UP FALCONER

September 2006: As Prime Minister Tony Blair faces difficulties extending detention without charge for terrorism suspects to 90 days, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, is asked on ABC radio in Australia if he is concerned about the issues involved: "No, I think in the face of attacks by terrorists the government has an obligation to make sure they take all legitimate steps to protect their citizens' life and limbs. In the context of the sorts of attacks that we've been facing for the last five or six years, it's absolutely vital, I think, that our laws be changed to effect that."

February 2007: In a speech to the Royal United Services Institute, Lord Falconer states that "government, in seeking to introduce an extension to 90 days, was fulfilling what it considered and still considers to be its primary duty".

November 2007: Now a Lords backbencher, Lord Falconer is informed by the cabinet office that he will not get the pension to which he thinks he is entitled, and threatens legal action against Gordon Brown's government.

December 2007: As Prime Minister Gordon Brown faces difficulties extending detention without charge for terrorism suspects to 58 days, Lord Falconer lets it be known that he opposes the move. "Friends of Falconer" tell the *Guardian* that "he does not believe the government has made a coherent case".



"I want him to know the difference between right and the need to call for an urgent review"

NUMBER CRUNCHING

50 Years since the Treaty of Rome created the European Union

50 National vetoes over EU policy areas removed by the Treaty of Lisbon last week

TV

Oliver Twist
Ballet Shoes
Sense and Sensibility
To The Manor Born
(all BBC1)

TORY party leaders, faced with falling poll ratings, traditionally go round being rude about immigrants and Europe for a while, in a process known as "going back to the comfort zone". BBC bosses, when fearing for their jobs, have a similar reflex, which is to start banging on about Jane Austen and Charles Dickens.

Coming at the end of a year in which all the senior figures in BBC Vision faced calls for their resignation – and BBC1 controller Peter Fincham was forced to walk the plank to save them – the 2007 Christmas schedule is purely a comfort zone. Astonishingly and depressingly, every peak-time drama over the whole holiday period could have been shown over Christmas 1979. Even the comedy special is a dust-off of **To the Manor Born**, Penelope Keith's snob sit-com from almost 30 years ago, while the rest of the budget and effort has been spent on inevitable literary heart-warmers.

The terrified BBC bosses, for example, have asked for more of **Oliver Twist**, even though Roman Polanski very recently added his own movie version to David Lean's DVD classic and it's only a few years since ITV dropped one.

Apart from making Fagin a sensitive mittel European humanitarian in line with modern sensibilities, there's nothing new this adaptation can possibly do; so we grimly plod through the unavoidable scenes – boy with empty bowl, Bill Sykes and the dodgy dog – with the audience struggling not to shout out the lines before the performers.

The show also proves that, in one crucial way, time has been cruel to Dickens on the telly. The orphans all sound like posh kids forcing their privately-dentisted teeth to deliver Italia Conti School mockney, like Tony Blair trying to get votes from Essex Man.

The attempt to give modern kids a Victorian or Edwardian Christmas as a justification for taking the licence fee continues with **Ballet Shoes**, from Noel Streatfield's novel, in which Hermione from Harry Potter prances about in pumps. And, although the BBC's head of drama has modishly described **Sense and Sensibility** as "Sex

"I preferred the old days when there were proper stars"

and the City in the country", it's really on because someone noticed that it's the only Jane Austen that Andrew Davies hasn't done yet and so a rush-order for bonnets has gone down to Costume again.

What's most objectionable about this is that period adaptations of middlebrow books have become automatically associated with seriousness and intelligence in television, and not just at the BBC. ITV1's reaction to its own recent crisis of public confidence was an emergency posh and bookish schedule including an EM Forster drama and a play about Kipling. But there is nothing inherently good or improving about pointing the camera at a RADA graduate in a bonnet and/or whiskers or a cart-wheel pocked with prop-department straw. A lot of these dramas come out as a very slightly superior kind of soap. And, though sold as an educational boon for children, these shows aren't really for the young at all, but aimed at government ministers and editors of a certain age.

The other depressing aspect of the Christmas schedule is that the Dickens, Streatfield and Austen were commissioned during the last BBC meltdown but one, when Blair's government was hesitating over whether to renew the charter and licence fee. Inevitably, the order went out that the BBC should do "more of what it does best" and so Tessa Jowell was promised that her long winter evenings would be warmed by the dramatic equivalent of nursery food: narrative plum duff with lashings of acting custard to make the readers of the *Mail* and *Telegraph* feel that all is probably right with the world.

But, after the year the corporation has had, this year's yuletide schedules offer a terrible vision of the ghost of Christmases to come. With horrible inevitability, the BBC has already responded to the fakery scandals by revealing plans to film all of Shakespeare's plays.

And so, all over the drama department, producers will be dragging out dog-eared copies of their GCSE English books or working through DVD box-sets of the works of Merchant & Ivory and David Lean. Delighted agents will be booming "dear boy, yes, he still has the whiskers and topper from last time!", while Andrew Davies wonders whether, for form's sake, he should type the scripts of his "new" *Pride & Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* in a different font.

The one figure who won't feature in this seasonal nightmare is Scrooge because these set-text retreats will cost a fantastic amount of money. Is there really nothing fresher and more original they could spend it on? Why is looking backwards the only way of showing that the BBC is going forward? Bah humbug.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

GOING LIVE

WHEN BBC News 24 went live to Christian Fraser in Lugano for the dirt on Fabio Capello, the new England football manager, it was to "tell us about his lifestyle, because that is what we all want to hear about".

"Well, he has a stunning view of Lake Lugano," Fraser revealed. "The neighbours want to know what we're doing," he added before his mobile phone went dead in mid-report.

SCANDAL-RACKED GMTV has marked the end of a ghastly year in fitting pantomime style. Whenever someone suggests things can't get any worse, up goes a chorus of "Oh yes they can..."

The latest well-publicised pratfall at the breakfast channel involves thirsty managing editor John Scammell, found slumped over his office computer in a post-prandial coma so deep no one could rouse him. Following a number of other drink-related incidents, Scammell was banned from attending GMTV Christmas lunches. Whether he hangs on to one of his other responsibilities – advising programme director Peter "McThug" McHugh, editor Martin Frizzell and deputy editor Malcolm Douglas on what wine to order with their weekly executive lunches – remains to be seen.

In fact Scammell isn't the only GMTV executive feeling thirsty as the effects of the telephone scandal start to bite. Finance director Rhian Walker recently lurched into GMTV reception at midnight, extremely drunk, and ordered a young runner to book a taxi to take her home.

Warned that there was currently a half-hour wait for cabs, Walker started screaming at the messenger and the security guard on the front desk, threatening that she'd get her husband to "come and sort you out".

She was later forced to apologise.

COMICAL scenes at the BBC, where a new spam-filtering service called Postino recently malfunctioned and had to be uninstalled after it started blocking legitimate emails.

Alas, when a luckless staffer at TV Centre tried to complain to the IT department his email was instead delivered to thousands of BBC employees in a classic piece of, er, spam.

Such was the quantity of bemused replies asking why on earth he was emailing them about it that the entire system crashed – another priceless bloomer from Auntie!

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

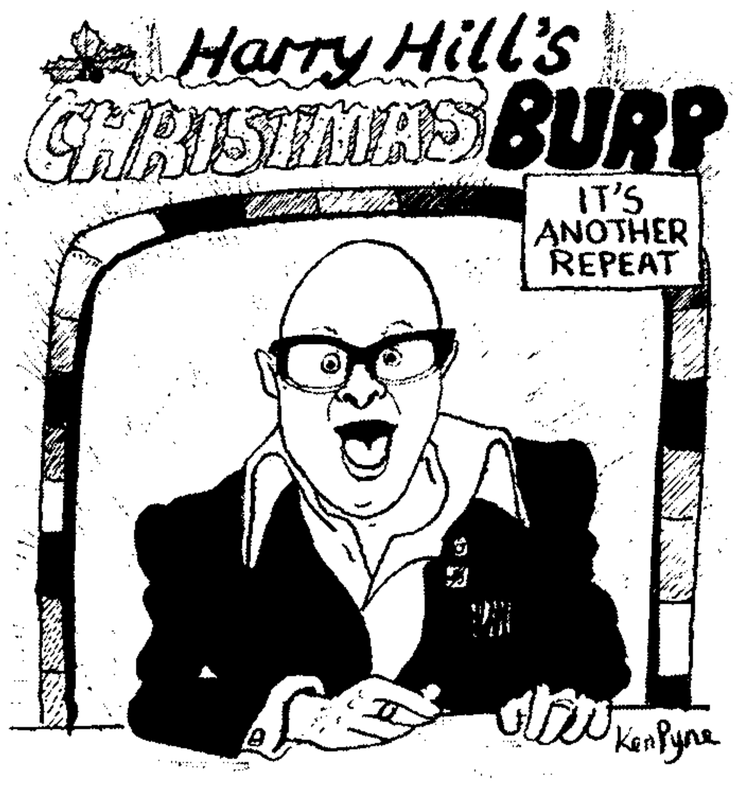
Anne Robinson: Who was the Norwegian explorer who first reached the South Pole?
Contestant: Sherpa Tenzing.
Robinson: What was the principal language used by the ancient Romans?
Contestant: Greek.

Are You Smarter Than A Ten-Year-Old?, Sky 1

Noel Edmonds: What is the last letter of the Greek alphabet?
Contestant: Zulu.

Eggheads, BBC2

Dermot Murnaghan: Complete the name of the Shakespeare play: Troilus and....?
Contestant: Er... John?



JUST FANCY THAT!

DURING the 2005 Tory leadership contest, BBC1's *Question Time* hosted a debate between David Davis and David Cameron. Afterwards the *Times* asked audience members what they thought.

"Davis won the battle," declared Elliot Van Emden, a 20-year-old student at Nottingham University. "He came clean about what he believed in. Cameron didn't say it how it is. It was just waffle."

Where is he now? Having failed to be elected as president of Nottingham's student union earlier this year, Elliot Van Emden is now working as research assistant to… David Cameron!

In The Courts

AMID the tantrums and tiaras of the Diana inquest last week, one small revelation was rather over-shadowed: the moment that the Duchess of York called pompadoured Harrods spokesman Michael Cole a liar.

In a witness statement submitted to the court on 6 July 2006, Cole claimed that Diana "discussed her fears with a number of people, but among them, Sarah, Duchess of York. For reasons that are well known, both of them had become estranged from the Royal Family. Diana and Sarah spoke about their fears of them both being killed because of the perceived damage that they had caused to the institution of royalty and to the House of Windsor in particular. When Diana was killed, Sarah, Duchess of York, wrote to the Queen apologising for her past misdemeanors and asked to be forgiven and taken back within the Royal circle of protection for the sake of her daughters, as much as her own safety. Sarah is still alive and so can be asked if what I have written is not the case."

Obligingly, Lord Justice Scott-Baker did exactly that, and a statement from Fergie was read out to the court on 13 December. "I have been asked to comment on assertions made by individuals in documents submitted to the Coroner… I am surprised to be asked to comment on mere assertion and speculation by Mr Cole. I note that Mr Cole's witness statement was made almost nine years after the death of the Princess of Wales and that he states no source for this information or belief. I have no recollection of any discussion with the Princess of Wales such as Mr Cole describes and I can categorically state that I never wrote any letter of the nature described by Mr Cole to Her Majesty the Queen."

Will the bouffant one now sue for this vicious slur on his reputation?

AD NAUSEAM

IT'S a very Merry Christmas from the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre (BACC), the broadcaster-funded body responsible for the pre-transmission clearance of TV advertisements that is roundly loathed by everyone in adland for its pointless nit-picking.

It appears that the BACC, or the BA-PC as it shall henceforth be known, may have a bit too much time on its hands during the season of goodwill. It has been sending broadcasters and advertisers a list of "Christmas Carols/Music" it deems acceptable and unacceptable for use in yuletide slots. Should you wish to air an advert with a festive spring in its step, feel free to have "Good King Wenceslas", "Jingle Bells", "The Wassail Song" or "We Wish You A Merry Christmas" as the soundtrack. But woe betide anyone who opts for a ditty from the blacklist of "religious music" such as "O Come All Ye Faithful", "Silent Night" or "Good Christian Men Rejoice". These, along with that rousing hymn of sedition "The Holly and the Ivy" and the endlessly pernicious "God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman" are all proscribed.

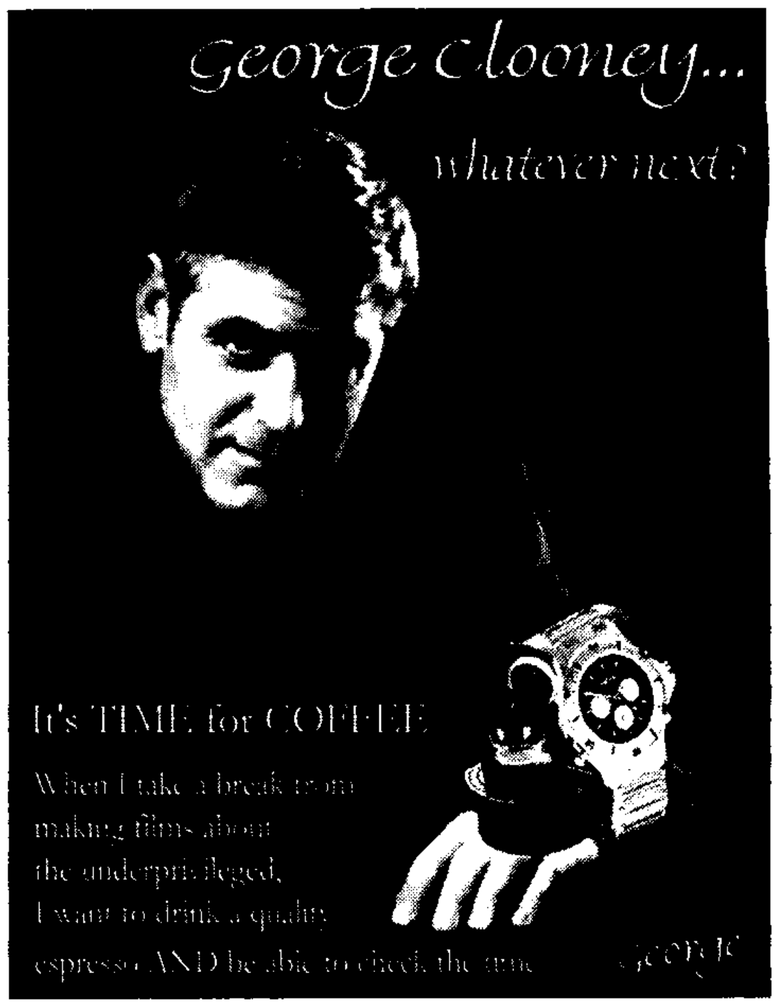
Oddly, the list the *Eye* has seen is in two minds about "I Saw Three Ships", which is to be found on the blacklist, but then marked as "OK" in pen. And yet, if Ad Nauseam remembers rightly, what was in those ships all three? Our Saviour Christ and His Lady, which seems a little risqué. Perhaps the BACC should just ban Christmas altogether and have done with it.

GEORGE CLOONEY, the face of Nestlé's poshest coffee brand Nespresso, outlines a stirring vision in the glossy promotional magazine which was recently distributed to selected addresses and purchasers of the company's range of espresso machines.

"My parents brought me up to ask questions, to constantly question authority... authority unchecked, without exception, corrupts."

Most admirable. But how did he react when, at a press conference in Italy, a journalist asked him how he reconciled his recent role in *Michael Clayton* as a lawyer exposing corporate dodginess with representing Nestlé, long the subject of a boycott for its aggressive marketing of formula milk in the developing world, which breaks World Health Organisation marketing rules?

"I'm not going to apologise to you for trying to make a living every once in a while," harrumphed the actor, who can command fees of $15m a film. "I work… um… you know I don't really have an answer for that. It's sort of an irritating question so, you know." He then switched off his microphone.



ALL MOD CONS

ALTHOUGH more medals and decorations are now being deservedly awarded to troops for bravery or distinguished service, the old practice of dishing them out to time-servers hasn't quite died out.

At the end of November, Brigadier Andrew Warde retired from the Defence Medical Service (DMS), which employs proportionately more women than any other part of the armed forces. Word has already gone round the Ministry of Defence that he will receive a CBE in the new year's honours list.

What makes this so remarkable is that soon afterwards, at the end of January 2008, Brigadier Warde (along with the DMS and MoD) faces a civil case on two counts of sexual discrimination and further charges of indirect discrimination against a subordinate female officer. By letting it be known that he is getting the CBE, the MoD would appear to be pre-empting the findings of the tribunal, which was supposed to sit in October but was then postponed until late January when he pleaded "stress".

The case against him is that when a female Major became pregnant he tried to move her out of his department and to a lower-ranking appointment. Was he encouraged by his superiors to take a tough line, to serve as an example to others? If he does appear in the new year's honours, MoD staff will draw the obvious conclusion.

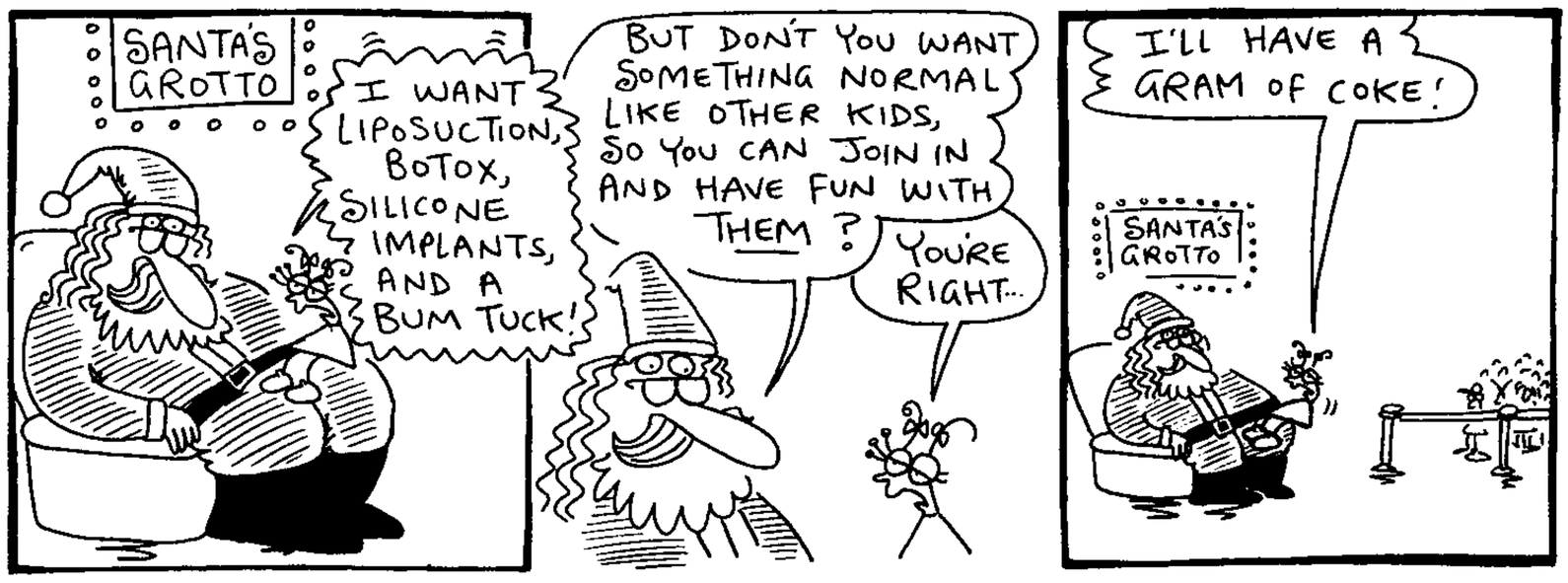
I-SKY

"THE Queen will have to stick on some extra slap – her Christmas speech will be filmed in high definition, TV Biz can reveal… The BBC will film the Queen's message, to be broadcast on Christmas Day at 3pm. However, viewers can see it with the added benefit of high definition at the same time on their new HD channel and on Sky Movies HD, where it will be followed by the premiere of Casino Royale starring Daniel Craig as 007."

– Sun, *5 December*

SUPER ROLE MODELS

KERBER


SANTA'S GROTTO
I WANT LIPOSUCTION, BOTOX, SILICONE IMPLANTS, AND A BUM TUCK!
BUT DON'T YOU WANT SOMETHING NORMAL LIKE OTHER KIDS, SO YOU CAN JOIN IN AND HAVE FUN WITH THEM?
YOU'RE RIGHT...
I'LL HAVE A GRAM OF COKE!
SANTA'S GROTTO

MEDICINE BALLS

New Labour's heart bypass

NEW Labour claims to be committed to centralising highly specialised surgery – but does it mean it?

In 2001, the public inquiry into the Bristol heart disaster (broken by the *Eye* in 1992) concluded that the 13 paediatric cardiac surgical units in the UK should be reduced to six to centralise expertise and resources, and to ensure quality and safety for patients. Six and a half years later, none has been closed or merged and three are down to a single consultant surgeon who can't possibly provide safe cover around the clock. So why has this ludicrously dangerous situation been allowed to persist?

Lack of leadership from a succession of clueless health secretaries – Alan Milburn, John Reid, Patsy Hewitt and Alan Johnson – has meant no one has grasped the nettle of merging units to protect children from unnecessary risk. Just as incomprehensible is the lack of action from the Healthcare Commission (HC).

The government appointed the chair of the Bristol Inquiry, Sir Ian Kennedy, to front this NHS watchdog, which is supposed to enforce standards of quality and safety. Initially established as the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI), it has undergone two name changes – from CHI to CHAI (Centre for Healthcare and Associated Infections) to HC – and will shortly be subsumed into the Care Quality Commission at huge administrative expense. But it has remained curiously silent about enforcing the recommendations of the inquiry that led to its foundation. Kennedy can hardly have forgotten his own findings.

This year, the HC launched a central cardiac audit website database (www.ccad.org.uk/congenital) that allows parents with a keen interest in statistics a chance to track down the outcomes of common congenital heart procedures. But the lessons from Bristol were as much about process as outcome, and I wouldn't want my child to go to a unit that only had a single specialist consultant surgeon left. And with so many units still carrying out the surgery, the numbers at each unit are too small to allow meaningful risk adjustment and hence comparison.

Paediatric cardiac surgery is enormously stressful, and has become a much less popular career choice post Bristol. The surgical teams brave enough to do it need to be congregated in fewer centres with more resources, more support and enough patients for meaningful audit. This would mean closing or downsizing units in key Labour constituencies, which is why there has been no progress. If Labour is incapable of responding in six years to the findings of the largest and most expensive inquiry in British history, its whole reconfiguration programme is a half-arsed sham. Merry Christmas.

M.D.

"I'll just cut the father's cord"

PROTECTION RACKET

IT IS hardly surprising that struck-off paediatrician David Southall should emerge unrepentant from the General Medical Council. He refused to apologise "for something I didn't do" – but then he is, as the GMC disciplinary found, a man with "deep-seated attitudinal problems" who "lacks insight into the multiplicity of his failings over a long period".

What is remarkable, however, is that 38 paediatricians should sign a letter of support saying Southall was the victim of a campaign to target prominent professionals in their field, especially paediatricians. They claimed that "many sincere" paediatricians had suffered complaints to the GMC at the hands of this "lobby" and that the GMC had failed to grasp the sensitivity, dilemma and emotional conflict generated when diagnosing child abuse. They warned that paediatricians will steer away from this vital work if they have no defence against such complaints.

Really? While the GMC receives complaints about paediatricians, as it does with other specialisms, it is "extremely rare" for them to be referred to the fitness-to-practise panel in connection with child protection work. Finlay Scott, the GMC chief executive, said that of 600 cases before the panel in the past three years, only two involved paediatricians in child protection work – one of those was clearly Southall. In a letter to the *Times*, he said a third case involved Sir Roy Meadow, often described as Southall's mentor, in Meadow's role as an expert witness. Hardly the "many" claimed by the paediatricians.

Southall last appeared before the GMC in 2004 after wrongly accusing Sally Clark's husband Stephen of murder after seeing him on television (this was shortly after Mrs Clark was herself wrongly jailed for murder). Southall was removed from child protection work. This time he wrongly accused a mother whose 10-year-old had hanged himself of murder. Meadow (*Eyes passim*) has been involved in a series of miscarriage cases.

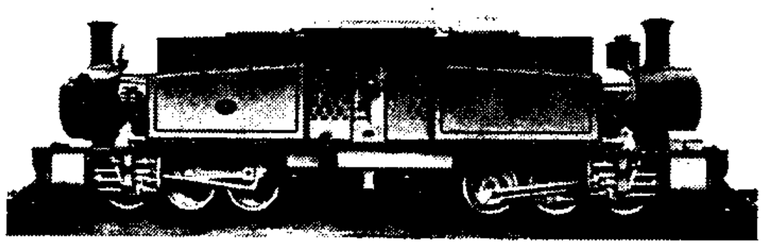
Neither Southall nor Meadow are therefore the victims of some unjustified campaign, as claimed. Their work has involved cases of mysterious death of infants subsequently found to be suffering from rare conditions at the borders of medical knowledge. Bill Bache, a solicitor now representing families whose children were involved in breathing experiments carried out on sick babies by Southall (*Eyes passim*), said: "The very fact that these *are* emotional cases places a duty on the professionals to present the data as accurately and dispassionately as they can. And they have a duty to explain any limitations of that data. What happens, however, is that they claim their experience over many years enables them to interpret the data in a way which is in fact without scientific foundation."

At his latest GMC hearing, Southall was also found guilty of keeping separate medical files on three other children, which meant that any doctor who later treated the children could have been denied access to crucial original medical records.

In fact Southall held around 4,450 such files, which now form part of the attorney general's ongoing review of all cases in which he acted as a prosecution witness. Police are also investigating allegations that children were damaged during Southall's controversial breathing trials. Bill Bache and his clients are demanding a public inquiry to pull together the various medical, criminal, civil and disciplinary investigations underway.

To outside eyes Southall's behaviour in these cases is extraordinary. The worrying thing is that 38 of his colleagues think it acceptable and above reproach.

SIGNAL FAILURES



Season's fleecings

THE rail industry's contribution to the festive season has been to give everyone a laugh with its excuses for fare rises in the new year.

"We are providing a higher-performing railway with new, refurbished and more punctual trains and better stations," said George Muir of the Association of Train Operating Companies (Atoc). "Nearly 91 percent of trains ran on time between April and September this year, the highest punctuality level for a decade."

If fares are rising to pay for *new and refurbished trains*, how come they're leaping by up to 9.8 percent on First Great Western, which is to dump its new rolling stock in the next few months and draft in more pisspoor "Pacer" trains based on 1970s bus technology? Atoc said £200m would be spent on new engines and refurbishment for FGW's high-speed [sic] train fleet, but FGW says the £200m will have to stretch to cover all its spending – "trains, stations and customer services" – during its 10-year franchise. Train refurbishment sugars the pill of a disappointing franchise for passengers, but apparently they must pay higher fares to have worn upholstery replaced.

Passengers at Northern Rail have also been promised train refurbishment as a poor substitute for new trains. Unregulated fares such as off-peak returns will rise 5.7 per cent on average, as more ancient, bumpy "Pacer" trains are drafted in to replace newer and better ones, which the government is sending to Scotland. A strange move, seeing as Scotland already has newer and better trains than Northern Rail – but then it also happens to be home to the prime minister, chancellor and former transport secretary Douglas Alexander.

New trains *are* arriving at Southeastern, but they're for new services from some Kent stations to St Pancras from December 2009. Southeastern will levy a hefty ticket premium for using them, but that's still not enough – it's now clobbering passengers who'll never set foot on the new trains with price rises of up to 14.9 percent, while the government hikes regulated fares by 6.8 percent.

"More punctual trains" is another excuse Atoc is using to justify fares rises. So how come FGW has some of the steepest rises when the latest official figures show its punctuality fell in the first quarter of 2007-8 to 83.8 percent (from 86.5 a year earlier)? And how come CrossCountry, whose punctuality fell from 89 to 85.5 percent, is allowed to hike unregulated fares by 7 percent in January? And why are unregulated fares on the King's Cross to Edinburgh mainline rising 6.6 percent after punctuality nosedived from 86.7 to 79 percent?

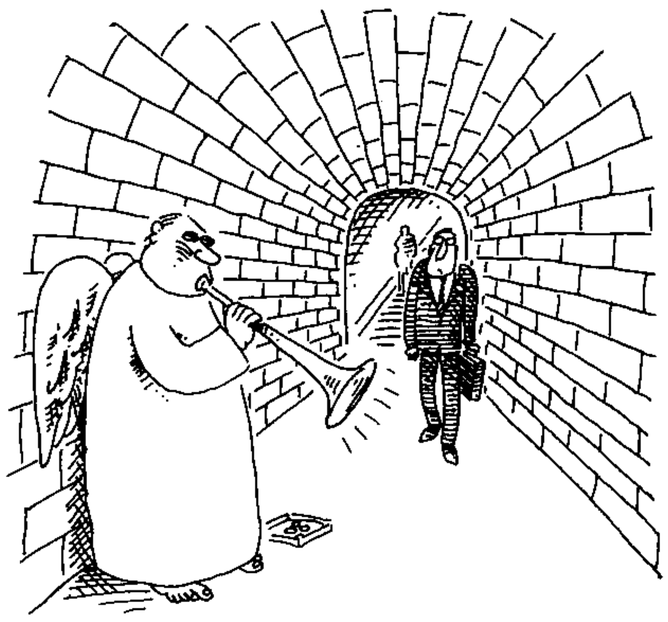
Revenue from rail fares is spent on *"better stations"*, according to Atoc. It boasts that the reopened Ebbw Vale line in south Wales will bring in new stations but doesn't say that the entire project is taxpayer-funded. Elsewhere "better stations" means correcting past neglect, where cash was taken from passengers but not spent on station maintenance.

What Atoc neglected to mention is that the rail network costs far more to run now than under British Rail, thanks to the current complicated and bureaucratic structure. For instance, rail regulators are now spending seven months analysing Network Rail's 12,000-page "strategic business plan". This massive job creation scheme will be repeated every five years and the government, insisting passengers must pay a bigger contribution to pay for it, has ordered a 4.8 percent rise in regulated fares on most franchises.

Atoc also forgot to mention its members' greed. Above-inflation fare rises on Southeastern and Southern last January helped Go Ahead grab a whopping £66m in rail profits in the year to July 2007 (55.5 percent higher than in 2006). In the first half of 2007-8, FirstGroup's UK rail profits leapt 9.8 percent to £48m.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS



Cluff

SEASON'S BEATINGS

IT HAS been a turbulent year for Newham council's celebrated parks constabulary, aka the Keystone Kops (*Eyes passim*), so when they came to have their Christmas celebration it was hardly surprising things got a bit emotional.

The venue for the do, on the evening of 8 December, was the Tereza Joanne, a restaurant boat moored in King George V dock in London's East End. Alas, as the drink flowed, one of the cardboard coppers referred to a gay colleague as a "raving homo" and made further observations about his sexual preferences, unsuitable for publication in a family magazine. Result: an almighty punch-up which had to be broken up by the restaurant's bouncers.

The head of Newham's aptly named "anti-social behaviour division", Ian Walker MBE, recruited a year ago with much fanfare from Camden council where he was known as "Mr Asbo", left early with a face like thunder. Perhaps he realises that Newham has some way to go to achieve mayor Sir Robin Wales's dream of "respect [for all] regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, language, HIV status, religion ... [*cont. p94*]"

● Many thanks to our anonymous correspondent "East Ender" for his or her very interesting letter about Newham. It arrived too late for the story to be included in this edition, but will get the space it deserves in a future issue.

● MEANWHILE here's a CCTV pic of the incident referred to in *Eye* 1198, when a uniformed Keystone, "Sergeant" Gerry Morgan, marched into a newsagent's shop in Plaistow and demanded to see the proprietor's commercial waste contract with Newham council. When Mr Devendra Patel didn't produce the document on demand, he was issued with a "stop and search" notice, as if he were a yobbo on the street. At least four other shopkeepers got them too. There are several worrying things about this picture.

1) Morgan (left) gave Mr Patel and his customers the impression he was a police officer. He is not a police officer, although he wears a uniform indistinguishable from that of a real one.

2) It is not a park keeper's job (or a policeman's) to harass shopkeepers over whether their waste disposal paperwork is in order and then treat them like criminal suspects if their answers are "unsatisfactory".

3) The "stop and search" notices issued by Newham's Keystone Kops are identical to those issued by the Metropolitan police, referring to the issuer as a "police officer" and stating that any complaint can be made to the Metropolitan Police Authority or the Independent Police Complaints Commission – neither of which, in fact, has jurisdiction over how council officials go about inspecting newsagents' binbag arrangements.

4) The man on the right is neither a policeman nor a Keystone Kop. He is former Newham Labour councillor Brian Collier, husband of serving councillor Marie Collier. What is he doing "on patrol" with the Keystones, and what business is it of his whether Mr Patel's papers are in order?

PS: Impersonating a police officer is a criminal offence.

UPSTANDING MEMBER

SO. FAREWELL then former Swansea council leader Lawrence Bailey, who has been disqualified as a councillor for amassing some 80,000 porn images on council-issued computers (*Eye 1196*).

Bailey's initial excuse that he had downloaded the porn "accidentally" began to look a bit thin when it emerged that the mucky adult hetero photos were saved on not one but four separate computers.

As well as the porn, on one of the computers police found copies of some 250 letters written to local papers by Bailey, using false names and addresses. Many were about what a great job, er, a certain Cllr Bailey was doing. His excuse was that it was "common practice" for Welsh politicians to make up letters to newspapers.

For two breaches of the council's code of conduct the Adjudication Panel for Wales banned Bailey from serving as a councillor for two-and-a-half years. He had already stepped down and says he won't seek office again.

Three months after the first batch of porn was discovered, but before any action had been taken, Bailey was holding forth to the council's standards committee on the dangers of accessing the internet, where "inappropriate images could be accidentally downloaded". You could not, as they say, make it up.

● MORE on the special charm of Plymouth's Conservative city council leader Vivien Pengelly, whose novel approach to employee relations was revealed in *Eye* 1198. Last month the well-liked veteran Plymouth Labour councillor Claude Miller – at 92, thought to be the oldest serving councillor in Britain – collected an MBE from the Queen at Buckingham Palace and met Gordon Brown at Downing Street. Cllr Miller's celebrations should have been rounded off with a special lord mayor's dinner in his honour. Alas, Cllr Pengelly attempted to wangle so many Tory councillors on to the guest list that there wasn't room for the small number of friends and family Cllr Miller wanted to invite. So he has asked, sadly, for the event to be cancelled. Nice one, Viv.

REEDER'S DIGEST

A COSTLY exercise in trying to teach a bunch of Labour cronies in the north-east better bullshitting skills has ended in tears.

Even some members of the Labour group on Durham county council were embarrassed by the appointment earlier this year of consultant Ann Reeder, former head of the Labour party's local government unit, as a political adviser to council leader Albert Nugent on £750 a day.

When opposition councillors asked exactly why Reeder was being paid by the council, and what did she did for all that dosh, council treasurer Stuart Crowe insisted she was there to help all political parties on the council – which came as news to the opposition Independents and Lib Dems. Especially as minutes show she was appointed "as a consultant to the Labour Group to support its leadership through their transitionary process." Ah, Crowe told councillors, there was a mistake in the minutes. It was "an error caused by loose drafting." Ooh, missus! Alas Nugent's own party group defied their leader and voted earlier this month to terminate Ms Reeder's contract.

Independent councillor John Shuttleworth told the *Eye*: "I have nothing against Ann Reeder, but her appointment was sheer cronyism." Shuttleworth should watch himself. When he started to make waves over this matter, he found an 8 inch plastic toy dagger on his desk with a note saying: "John, I return the knife – Albert."

JONES THE MOUTH

AN INSIGHT into what passes for political discourse in Wales, from the village of Cilfrew, where residents are fighting National Grid's controversial high-pressure gas pipeline across Wales (*Eyes passim*).

Labour councillor Doreen Jones, a former mayoress of Neath Port Talbot, knows which side she's on – that of the government and National Grid. But was it necessary for her to greet protester and Cilfrew residents' association member Natasha Beynon, when she and a friend turned up to a meeting of Blaenhonddan community council, with the words: "Here come Twit and Twat"? Or for Jones to remark, when another residents' association member, Sue Brazier, arrived at a previous meeting: "Here comes one cow – the other hasn't arrived yet"?

Fourteen villagers have now submitted signed statements to the local government ombudsman for Wales, complaining about their potty-mouthed councillor, who denies insulting anyone. She has also "taken legal advice". Surely an expensive way of getting told to "shut the fuck up".

● EYE 1195 reported how senior Hampshire county council officer Andrew Smith had been appointed as the authority's new £210,000-a-year chief executive despite a district auditor's recommendation that he face a disciplinary hearing over the way he awarded IT contracts worth £1.2m to expensive consultants without putting the work out to tender. Hampshire has now concluded its "disciplinary" process and – surprise, surprise – finds that neither Smith nor two other senior officers did anything wrong. Outgoing chief exec Peter Robertson sagely says there are "lessons to be learned", while Tory council leader Ken "Sod the Taxpayer" Thornber says Smith has his "full support". Just fancy that!

Spotted in the Scottish Parliament car park, Edinburgh *(Submitted by Susan Rae)*

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

GLASGOW's preparations for hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2014 are well under way – with the sale of a sizeable chunk of yet another of the city's sports grounds to a housing developer.

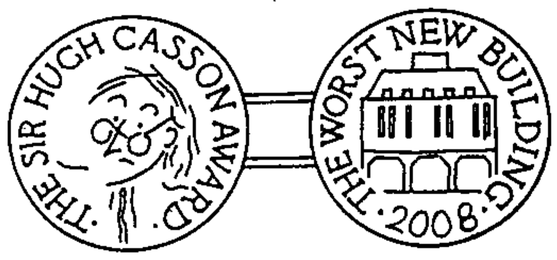
Hillhead Sports Club's playing fields, used for rugby, hockey and cricket, were created as a memorial to the many former pupils of Hillhead High School who lost their lives in the First World War. They were also a designated green space in the city's plan. But now the club wants funds to upgrade its facilities and has turned to property developer Barratt Homes.

Barratt intends to build 44 flats in a four-storey block, plus some "mews-style houses" on part of the site. In return, the club gets a new stand and clubhouse, plus an all-weather pitch. Glasgow councillors granted planning permission earlier this month after hearing that the sports ground was "in jeopardy due to financial issues".

Glasgow city council planning officers said the site's status as a war memorial didn't protect it, because the plaque itself will be preserved.

NOOKS and CORNERS

ALTHOUGH our superstar architects have done their best to produce architecture conspicuous for its arrogance, pretentiousness, bad manners and plain stupidity, in the search for the worst new building completed in 2007 no one edifice stands out as a monstrous offence against reason or taste.



However, it is not just architecture that can mar the urban environment – public monuments can achieve the same effect and increasingly are. Hence this year's Hugh Casson Medal is awarded to a work of "sculpture".

That public sculpture should be a growth industry is curious. As the nation diminishes in importance and descends further into fatuity, so the demand increases for memorials and monuments that celebrate our finest hours. This national wallowing in past triumphs is pretty pathetic. And in view of our rulers' enthusiasm for military adventures, perhaps it is disturbing that so many of the new monuments are associated with wars.

This would matter less if the new memorials and statues were any good. But they are not. They are embarrassing.

The Animals at War memorial in the middle of Park Lane, for example, is astonishing in its vulgar sentimentality. Then there is the Women of World War II monument in Whitehall (the Casson winner for 2005 – see *Eye* 1149), so coarse in concept and execution, which dares to challenge the Cenotaph.

Then there are the statues. Mercifully, Westminster council and English Heritage opposed the lobby who wanted to put Ian Walters' childish statue of Nelson Mandela in a floral shirt in Trafalgar Square, so it stands in Parliament Square instead. And now it has been joined by a statue of David Lloyd George, lurching with arm outstretched and his cape blowing in the wind. Oddly enough the sculptor was Professor Glynn Williams of the Royal College of Art who, two years ago, dared to criticise the late Ian Walters' figure of Mandela as "run-of-the-mill mediocre modelling".

In fact, both statues are embarrassingly bad, and it is instructive to compare the Lloyd George statue with the one of the former prime minister in the lobby of the House of Commons by Uli Nimptsch, installed in 1963, to see how much the art of sculpture has declined in the last few decades. One problem is that today sculptors and patrons seem to think statues should be naturalistic, like Madame Tussauds waxworks in bronze. But a great statue is so much more than that: a figure monumentalised and made symbolic.

But there is worse. Take the Battle of Britain Memorial on the Victoria Embankment, unveiled two years ago. This has animated relief friezes depicting the dramatic events of the summer of 1940. Now there is nothing necessarily wrong with figurative sculpture on a memorial. On the magnificent Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner, Charles Sergeant Jagger depicted the actions and sufferings of soldiers without sentimentality in an expressive style based on study of the past. But the inspiration for the sensationalist friezes on the Embankment was not the art of ancient Egypt or Greece but the modern cartoon strip. What has been unleashed on us is "Paddy Payne: Fighter Pilot" from the old *Lion* comic.

The sculptor was Paul Day, who seems to be doing very well, for it was he who was chosen by London & Continental Railways to model an "iconic" sculpture to enhance the restored St Pancras train shed as the new Eurostar terminal.

Standing below the giant clock to stun and repel passengers is a 30ft bronze of an embracing couple. This, called *The Meeting Place*, is of the waxwork-realist school, with every detail of clothing (including high heels) accurately depicted four times life size. Mr Day has modestly stated of the pair that: "I wanted them to be outside of race and outside of time." Some hope: all art is of its time while so vulgar a conception is instantly dated. As for symbolism, the vaguely Caucasian faces of the couple are as animated and passionate as participants in a pornographic film.

The superb restoration and adaptation of W.H. Barlow's train shed is marred by the gratuitous inclusion of this tasteless creation.

And I am horrified to learn that more is to come: a bronze plinth with a 12 metre frieze of encounters inspired by the film *Love, Actually* is still promised. Even before it appears, this repellent effort at public art surely deserves the Sir Hugh Casson Medal for 2007.

OVERSHADOWED, literally, in the revamped St Pancras by Paul Day's horror is a more modestly scaled new statue of Sir John Betjeman by Martin Jennings.

While it is good to have tribute paid to the sainted founder of this column, the truth is that it was his rival, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, who in his role as chairman of the Victorian Society had far more to do with saving St Pancras. If the Vic Soc hadn't succeeded in getting both St Pancras and King's Cross listed at grade I in 1967, neither terminus would be standing today. Yet nobody from the Victorian Society was invited to the junket when the Queen formally reopened the station. The Meeting Place is said to have cost "about £1m", so it's nice to know London & Continental Railways has so much money to throw around. Perhaps it might consider giving the Vic Soc a donation – especially as the society is celebrating its 50th anniversary next year.

'Piloti'

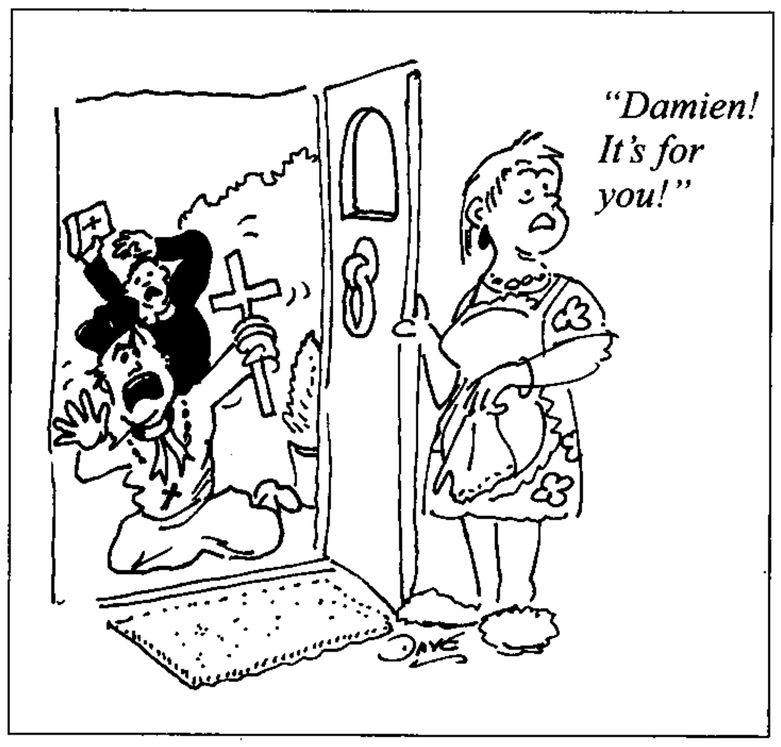
YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

How could anyone bring themselves to do such a horrible thing?
Ugh!
HIRST TRIED TO BUY COLLECTION OF STUFFED ANIMALS FOR £1m.
BIZARRE COURT CASE LATEST.
1+1=3
"THE VILLAGE SCHOOL"

I-SPY *Co-Op, Wakefield*

Submitted by David Pimblett. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*



MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

OF THE many strange things about the post-mortem life of Maria Callas (not the least of them being the way her endlessly reissued discs keep EMI Classics afloat), the most bizarre is the relentless trade in her possessions.

An auction soon after she died, in 1977, sold off frocks, shoes, love letters and even garden furniture. Then, in 2000, came another, effectively a high-class garage sale that emptied out her underwear and knick-knack drawers. The jewellery was flogged in 2004, and then last week in Milan came a fourth: more frocks and knick-knacks (some in seriously questionable taste) in 330 lots totalling £1.26m.

The unending flow of Callas fetish objects is beginning to resemble the sales of relics in the Middles Ages – all those Holy foreskins, said to be enough, if stitched together, to upholster a settee. Did Callas *really* own and wear so many gloves, scarves and hats? And even if she did, the sight of portly middle-aged men bidding for her petticoats and knickers isn't edifying; heaven knows what they get up to with the stuff behind locked doors.

It's time this sordid business stopped, and not just for reasons of propriety but of legality. In the 2000 sale it was apparent that a number of the items going for a song were things the diva must have borrowed and not given back, including music scores marked "Library, La Scala", and a Bible "placed by the Gideons" which she must have lifted from a hotel. One can only hope that whoever paid the total of £30,000 for Callas-marked scores in last week's sale will have the decency to check their provenance. And as for the bath robes…

Meanwhile we can take a sort of comfort from the fact that, as no opera star since Callas has been quite so feted, there's unlikely to be a repeat performance of these terrible sales for anyone else. Not even Pavarotti. Just conceivably there may still be a market, thirty years on, for his hankies, but his underpants? I doubt it.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Ledballs

"My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Olympics had hoped to attend the debate, but she is metaphorically 'Over the hills and far away' – no doubt 'Out on the tiles' – so that leaves me to say to my hon. Friend, 'Your time is gonna come'. Through 'Good times, bad times', my hon. Friend has been a champion for Middlesbrough and for Cleveland."

– **Nick Brown** *apologises for the absence of Tessa Jowell, who was attending the Led Zeppelin reunion, in the Commons*

"John Lennon famously described the blues as 'a chair, not a design for a chair, or a better chair... It is the first chair.' Led Zeppelin upholstered it, etched it with elaborate carvings, painted it in the most lurid, loudest colours, made it the biggest and most expensive chair in the music business. They reinvented the chair as heavy metal."

– **Mick Brown**, *Daily Telegraph*

"Inside the bony cavities of his outsize head Plant created real resonance so he could really sing… For 10 years, rock and roll had been working towards something that would combine the extraordinary capacities of electronic instruments with the anarchic energy of youth, and there in the Albert Hall on January 9, 1970, I found it. The spring god Dionysus had arisen and was shaking his streaming red-gold mane on stage. In these four figures spinning in their vortex of sound, male display was transcending itself."

– **Germaine Greer**, *Daily Telegraph*

"Page dispensed powerchords like an aged Thor lobbing down thunderbolts for kicks."

– **Peter Paphides**, *Times*

"Much to the amusement of my Spectator colleagues, I am still wearing my ID bracelet. Well, it's the rock equivalent of Max Boyce's 'I was there', isn't it? And I was: I was at the Led Zeppelin reunion. I've got a bracelet, and I'm not afraid to use it. Twenty-seven years after it was grounded by the sudden death of the band's drummer, John Bonham, it was something else to watch the Zeppelin fly once more – and none of us could quite believe it… Was that a new chord progression in the intro to Ramble On? Was Plant's beard longer than in previous public appearances? These are the things that matter to the devout, those who gather in what Led Zep call the 'Houses of the Holy'."

– **Matthew D'Ancona**, *Daily Telegraph*

"Who could have guessed that the ear-splitting, mind-blowing music designed to blast the world apart would become the safe excitement of middle age – its comforting consolation – and that men older than the Prime Minister would still be rock gods beyond criticism or compare? Would we have guessed when Led Zep started out that nearly all would even be alive, let alone be in full possession of their powers today? They were our surrogates on the frontline, leading the reckless lives most of us couldn't and wouldn't dare."

– **David Robson**, *Express*

"Yet that ferocity of desire was also the secret of their genius… It was elemental in its force. The myths and controversies surrounding them have died away, but Led Zeppelin can still make us feel profoundly alive."

– **Ludovic Hunter Tilney**, *Financial Times*

"Were Led Zeppelin the best band ever? No – they were even better than that."

– **Marc Lee**, *Daily Telegraph*

PRISONS: A TITANIC STRUGGLE

THE government's plan to build its way out of the prison overcrowding crisis by putting up three ludicrously named Titan jails, each housing 2,500 inmates, is doomed before it has even begun.

Scorn and scepticism were the response from those working in the criminal justice system when Justice Secretary Jack Straw announced that he had secured £1.2bn for the jails – a curious claim, as the cash isn't intended to cover the cost of actually building the prisons. But documents leaked to Napo, the probation officers' union, show that by some spooky coincidence, the latest government spending review is demanding that Straw's Ministry of Justice (MoJ) find almost the same amount – more than £1bn – in "efficiency savings" over the next four years. And where will those "efficiency savings" be?

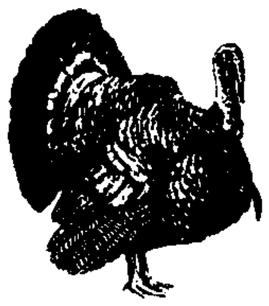
The MoJ finance documents show that more than £350m is to come off the courts budget. Legal aid will be slashed and courts and tribunals closed or merged. This will lead to delays for some and a denial of access to justice for others.

Prisons and probation services under the recently created National Offender Management Service (which *Eye* readers will know has itself been a Titanic waste of money) will have to make £500m cuts. Last week it was announced that to save money jails were effectively being shut down, with inmates locked in their cells from Friday lunchtime until Monday morning.

Straw's Titan money has clearly not come from the current Comprehensive Spending Review which is demanding the "efficiency savings", aka the cuts in services; and bidding for the next spending review round, 2011-2014, does not start until next autumn, with decisions not announced until October 2010.

Even if the new jails were built under Gordon Brown's beloved private finance initiative, they would cost hundreds of millions a year to run, which the Treasury simply does not have. And jails the size of six football fields might well blend into the endless open spaces of the US, but which congested city in Britain would want one in its backyard? The common belief, therefore, is that they simply won't happen.

Though grandiose prison-building schemes appear to answer opposition criticism of the government's failure to deal with the expanding prison population, it is more likely there will simply be less publicity about sentencing reforms that take the less serious offenders out of jail altogether. Then – hey presto! – by the time anyone realises the expensive Titans aren't being built, Britain won't actually need them.



Down on the Farm

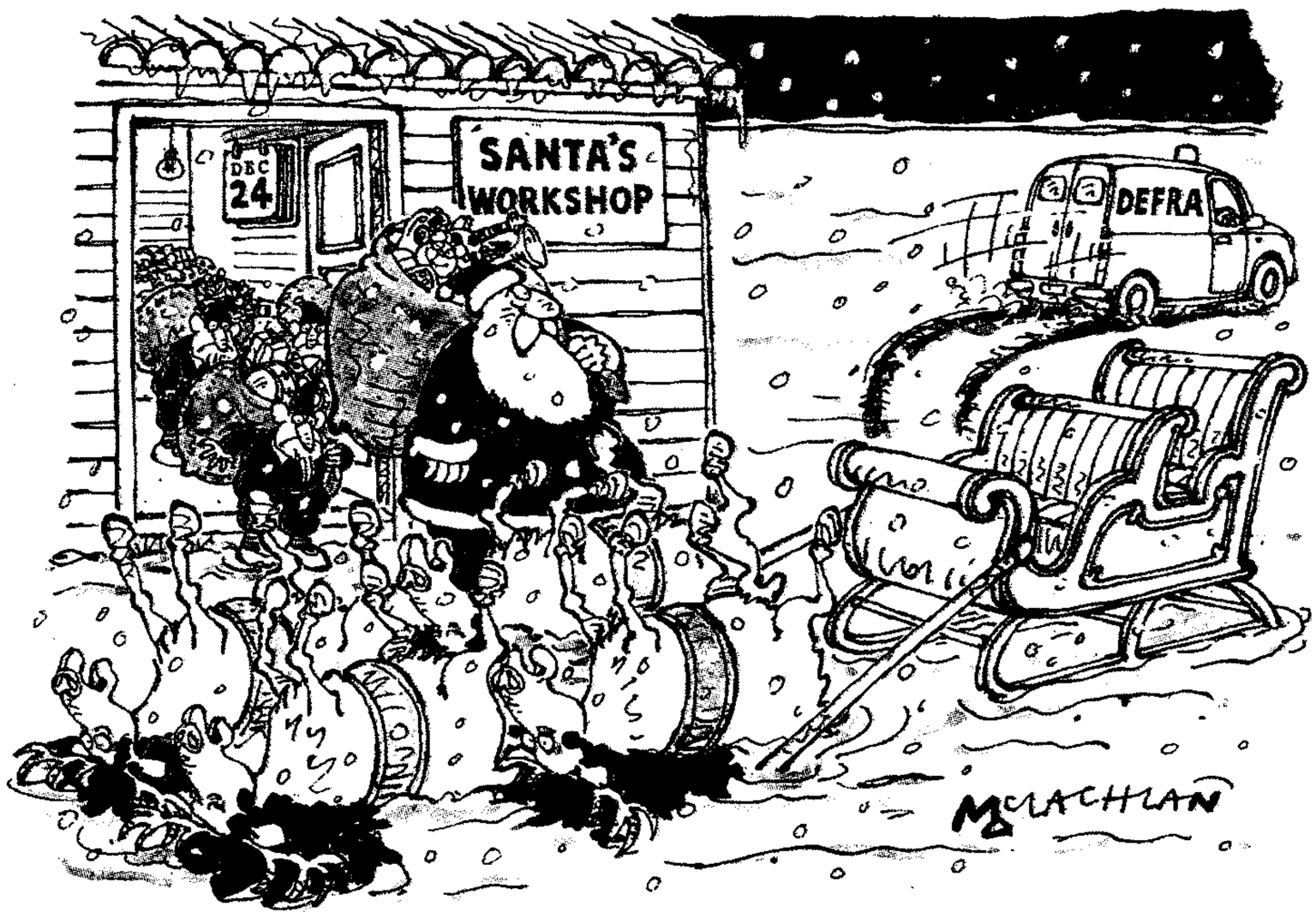
THE *annus horribilis* inflicted on Britain's livestock farmers by bluetongue and Defra's very own home-made foot-and-mouth shambles is ending with little cheer in sight.

Having lost £500m through the EU's ban on lamb exports at just the time of year when exports to the continent normally reach their height, farmers in the south-east are now are at their wits' end, having to slaughter thousands more sheep which cannot be moved to western winter pastures, thanks to the insistence of Defra and Brussels that bluetongue movement restrictions must remain. Defra refuses to divulge information as to whether the midges which carry the disease in summer have disappeared, treating it as a state secret.

Then the "Portuguese presidency" of the EU has been pressured by Brussels officials into reviving the proposal that every sheep in the EU must be electronically tagged. This will strike a death-blow at much of what remains of Britain's hill-farming. It is not physically possible to keep track of which sheep over hundreds of square miles of moorland may have lost their ear tags (even Defra a year or two back worked out that the cost of this scheme to farmers would be considerably greater than their yearly income). No country will suffer more from this ridiculous new law than Britain, with by far the largest number of sheep in the EU, many spending at least part of their time wandering the hills.

At least arable farmers have something to celebrate, with world grain prices doubling in the last six months, not least thanks to the EU's insistence that, to save the planet, much of our cereal land will soon have to be given over to biofuels. But with world food stocks facing an unprecedented deficit, neither Defra nor Brussels seems to have given any thought to where in the future, if we are to meet that EU biofuels target, we are going to get our food from. Already the doubling of grain prices is threatening disaster to pig and poultry farmers, for whom feed is their major cost (hence those legendary £100 organic turkeys this Christmas).

'Muckspreader'



Letters

Blame the Tories

Sir,

In the City (1199) inadvertently no doubt calls NR "the building society". With respect to building societies that is precisely what it is not.

A long time ago there was a small building society called Northern Rock – I was an agent for it – staffed by nice people who were easy and efficient to work with and overseen by a paternalistic board of directors led by the avuncular and very pleasant Viscount Ridley. Even had they wished to get involved in sub-prime nonsense they legally could not have. They were there to take deposits and lend money on sure things at less than 100 percent of valuation.

And then, with horrible irony, the Tory government, including the Viscount's brother Nicholas, decided financial services needed to be shaken up and people needed better competition etc etc blah blah blah. Or in other words their friends in the City wanted more opportunities to make cash.

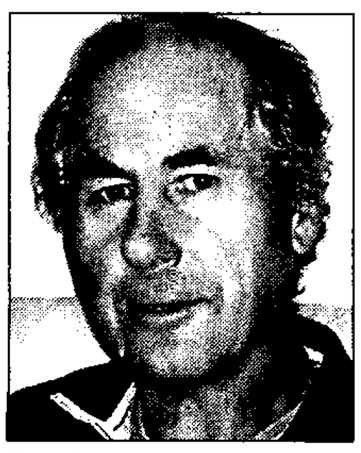
Building society members, thinking that nothing would be different and seeing some readies voted to become a bank and it all went wrong. I wonder how many of those anxiously queuing outside branches of NR had happily accepted a payout as a bribe on demutualisation? After that it all started to go wrong. Under shareholder pressure the nice people disappeared, agencies were terminated immediately, the bank became remote, profit driven and an administrative nightmare as many intermediaries and solicitors will confirm. The disaster had started and it's no surprise to me that things went horribly awry. Yes, of course Labour should have been more alert; but the responsibility lies at first with the Tories and the "greed is good" culture of the 80s. Like Railtrack, a time bomb was left with only the amount of years to pass as the only uncertainty on the road to ruin. It will happen again.

Yours sincerely
MAGNUS K. MOODIE,

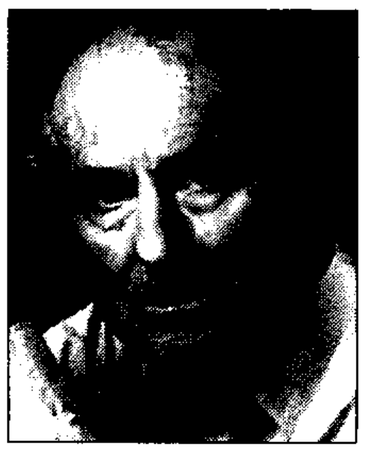
Richard Coutts & Palfrey Limited, Solicitors & Estate Agents.

● *Slicker writes: Re calling NR a "building society". This was a put-down in the sense that NR was and is a building society which thought it was a bank. It was not a mistake but a deliberate insult. Apologies for any confusion.*

Lookalike



Roth



Darwin

Sir,

Have others noticed that troubled amnesia victim, John Darwin, and celebrated author, Philip Roth, appear to be twins? Perhaps they co-authored Roth's novel 'Deception'?

The public is given to understand, however, that one twin is more intelligent than the other.

CATHY BOYLAN,

France.

Right and wrong

Sir,

Far from having a less hostile attitude to the far right in the past than I do now, as HP Sauce laboriously implies (Eye 1199), even as a teenager I used to bore my friends (and local letters editors) rigid with my diatribes against Nazis and Fascists. Thus, the saintly Rowan Williams – then editor of our school magazine – actually asked me to tone down the vehemence of one anti-Nazi article before he would agree to print it.

I did receive a letter, 25 years ago, from a David Jones offering detailed information about leftists in his regional CND, and I did buy him a meal to follow it up; but, prior to that meeting, he had said nothing about any previous involvement with the extreme right. When he later revealed it, it was in the context of having broken with such extremists completely. He then sent me two or three more letters, after which I never heard from him again – presumably because, as your story states, he reverted to type and signed up to the BNP.

My record of opposition to the extreme right is tediously consistent and very well documented – not only as "elder statesman", as you kindly describe me, but also as "wannabe politician" in the early 1980s.

Yours faithfully,
DR JULIAN LEWIS MP,

House of Commons.

Open and shut case

Sir,

The crucial difference between the Scottish National Party's donation from Brian Souter (Salmond Stakes, 1199) and Scottish Labour donations is that it was open and transparent.

By contrast, according to press reports beleaguered Scottish Labour leader Wendy Alexander's team apparently attempted to conceal a possible donation from First Bus Group boss Moir Lochhead.

Furthermore, Scottish Labour only raised 20 percent of its last Scottish parliament election spending in Scotland and the balance was from anonymous outside interests via London Labour.

In the interests of their newly-found openness and transparency, will Gordon Brown and Wendy Alexander recommend that only voters registered in Scotland can finance Scottish elections?

This is an English subsidy we don't want.

Yours hopefully,
CALUM STEWART,

Edinburgh.

Drug addict

Sir,

Dr Jon Gurr dismisses palliative drugs because they will not prevent deaths but only postpone them. Does he know of any drugs that have a permanent effect? If so, please could he send me some. I want to live forever.

Yours hopefully,
DAVID BARRATT,

Via email.

Paying the bills

Sir,

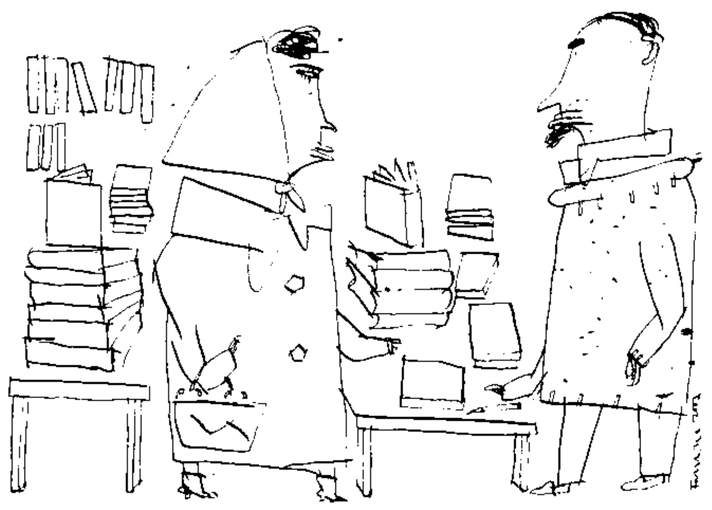
So Lexus are among several companies ticked off by the Advertising Standards Authority for making misleading claims about the environmental friendliness of their wares (Ad Nauseam, 1198). Hopefully these aren't the same claims which have so frequently adorned the inside cover of Private Eye?

Yours,
WILL NAYLOR.

Via email.

Dear Reader
Here are second helpings of highlights from our fabulous 2007!
Huge thanks to the NHS in July as Jez has an in-growing toenail removed
HOW DID YOU COME TO DROP A CAST-IRON CHIMINEA ON YOUR FOOT?
In AUGUST we hit the art trail at the Edinburgh Fringe on our fifth holiday
JEZ, CHECK OUT THIS TRAMP: IS HE DRUNK OR BEING AVANT-GARDE?
Lotte's extracurricular exam results in SEPTEMBER and it's jubilatim!
I ALWAYS KNEW SHE HAD THE GIFT OF AROMATHERAPY!
WHEATGRASS SMOOTHIES ALL ROUND!
DOUBLES!
Our year is blighted by tragedy in OCTOBER with the death of one of our prized Bonsai trees
RECYCLING OUR MINIATURE PINE AS BESPOKE CHOPSTICKS IS WHAT HE WOULD HAVE WANTED
In NOVEMBER we're off on our seventh holiday of the year – winter sun on an eco-holiday to Brasil!
BAI
DIGGING OUT OUR OWN LATRINES IS SO HUMBLING. I'M ESPECIALLY PROUD OF THE BIDET
DECEMBER and we do our bit for the planet with our first carbon neutral Christmas
RAW SPROUTS ROCK!
HAPPY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!
Love Jez & Quin xxx.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Have you got anything that doesn't have an introduction by Stephen Fry?"

Railing at Dr B. Ching

Sir,

Once again Dr B. Ching starts with an obvious truth and extrapolates to obviously flawed conclusions. The new high-speed link from St Pancras is great to have and will increase the number of passengers between the south-east and France and Belgium. Trains are competitive on journeys of up to about three hours so the TGV in France has largely replaced air travel from Paris to Lyon and Brussels, and in the same way the Pendelino from London to Manchester and Liverpool has won back many air passengers. In France this trend has been helped by motorway tolls and the anti-competitive practices of Air France in cahoots with the French government. Despite this there are many routes, eg Paris to Marseille, Nice, Toulouse, on which air continues to hold a significant share of the market against TGV, primarily because the rail journey is above the three hour threshold.

To suppose that a five-hour rail journey time from London to Frankfurt (mainly a business destination) is going to make much of a dent in air travel is just wishful thinking. Likewise, a high-speed rail link to the north of England and Scotland will not replace the highly competitive air carriers serving Scotland, though it will certainly add much-needed capacity in middle England.

All modes of transport should focus on what they are good at; for passenger rail that means suburban services in major cities and inter-city journeys of up to three hours. That doesn't mean that rail journeys of over three hours should not exist: there are trains that run full from London to Aberdeen, but hardly any passengers travel the whole trip. Britain should focus on increasing capacity and incremental speed improvements, not turning the clock back to the days before planes existed.

NICK THOMPSON,

Via email.

Blame the Belgians

Sir,

Much as I share Dr B. Ching's enthusiasm for London-Frankfurt in five hours by train (1199), he shouldn't hold his breath. For once it is not Britain's crap railways holding things up – it's Belgium. The vital high-speed line through the northern Ardennes from Liege to Aachen on the German border is nowhere near finished, and, by Belgian standards of construction, might be finished by the year 2086. It'd be quicker to change at Lille and jump on a TGV via Strasbourg.

PAUL STUMP,

Via email.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

Following John Darwin's adventures in a canoe, I find myself wondering whether someone in their late 50s could single-handedly paddle the Atlantic and what they would look like on arrival in Central America. Would it be at all possible for your art department to mock up a photograph of a suitable attired man being rescued by a young Panamanian lifeguard?

Yours,
MIC CLARKE,

London E7.

I-SPY *Nerja, Spain*

Submitted by Rae Audas.

Textile message

Sir,

Thank you for bringing the proposed closure of the Textile Conservation Centre to the attention of your readers. The closure would be a serious blow to our profession, both here in the UK and in Europe and the United States, as TCC-trained conservators are to be found at major museums around the world.

Best wishes,
JOANNE HACKETT
(Senior Textile Conservator),

Victoria and Albert Museum.

Lookalike

Alien **Brand**

Sir,

I love Russell Brand tremendously, but I can't help seeing the alien in him...

GILL PERKINS,

Via email.

Brand awareness

Sir,

The review of Russell Brand's autobiography "My Booky Wook" (1199) displayed a lack of knowledge of Brand's public persona in its criticism of his prose style. The reviewer seems perplexed and irritated by the juxtaposition of words like "numinous" with working class grammatical constructions such as "I was angry with them flowers" and wonders bad temperedly "Is he literate or not? Can't he make up his mind?"

Part of Brand's widespread appeal is his ability to reference quite complex intellectual ideas with a laddish, cockney delivery.

Like Jamie Oliver, who made it okay for lads to cook, Brand has made it okay for lads to read.

Yours sincerely,
LINDA MARTIN,

East Grinstead.

Sir,

Re your review of Russell Brand's "Booky Wook" (Eye 1199). I may be missing something but surely the point of an autobiography is that it is about oneself?

Sincerely,
ANDY HUNTER,

Newcastle upon Tyne.

Boris for yamro?

Sir,

Are Livingstone's Dick Whittington days numbered? The anagram of his contender would seem to suggest so.

BORIS JOHNSON = JOB'S ON, HON. SIR

Yours in Schadenfreude,
TIM HOPKINS,

Luton, Beds.

JOLLY CHRISTMAS

BY RICHARD JOLLEY

"With these milder winters, kids are having to improvise"

"The kids have got one of those light-up Santas for the garden"

"It's just what I wanted"

CHRISTMAS SOLUTIONS

"Clear Channel Christmas Proximity Solutions" – *adverts*

"Betterware Christmas Solutions" – *gifts*

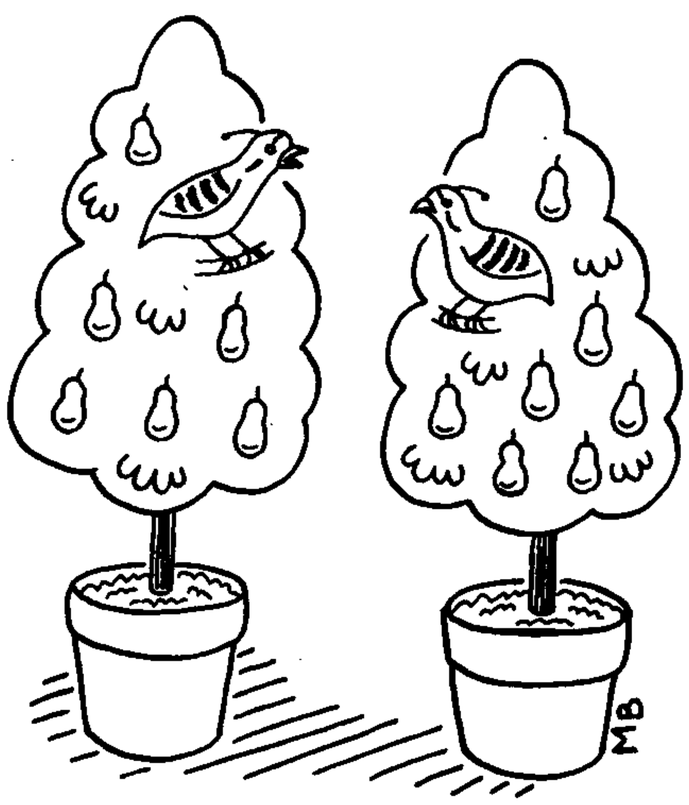
"Find Your Creative Holiday Gift Wrapping Solutions at Lisa's Gift Wrappers!" – *wrapping paper*

"B&Q Tree Solutions" – *fake Christmas trees*

"BBC Good Food: As the countdown to Christmas gathers pace, follow our food solutions and you'll sail through all the challenges of the season" – *recipes*

"3G Seafood Solutions celebrates Christmas with fish and seafood alternatives" – *dinner*

All submitted by readers



"I hear Gordon Brown's pressing for Christmas to be extended to 56 days"

French lesson

Sir,

Your cartoon asserting that French farmers are some of the most backward in the world is complete cobblers. For one thing, France is (and always has been) self-sufficient in food. The Common Agricultural Policy, also, exists to ensure that Europe is self-sufficient in food too. Partly because of the inevitable middle-man, it is free trade that is the enemy of African farmers, not the CAP.

Farmers' markets (a French idea) have spread to this country and have proved very popular here. (The produce on sale is excellent on the whole.)

So, check your facts before indulging in xenophobia.

Yours,
C.R. JAMES,

Brightlingsea, Essex.

An architect writes...

Sir,

Regarding Piloti's remarks concerning Ealing Broadway Centre: whilst I am delighted to take applause for the "thoughtful" bits I would like to share the credit for the more vulgar parts with others.

Yours in exquisite taste,
FRANCIS ROBERTS,

Via email.

Pedants Corner

...Might I point out that "Pedants' Corner" (sic, 1199) does not require the apostrophe you stuck on it. "Pedants", in this sense, is adjectival. You cannot argue that the apostrophe is one of possession because if you did you would have to add one all of a sudden to Pseuds Corner, which has been apostrophe-free since the dawn of time.

I hope this is sufficiently pedantic for the next Pedants/s' Corner.

TOM CUTLER.

...Rotten Boroughs makes the common mistake of using "the East End" as a synonym for east London. In fact the East End proper is Whitechapel, Stepney, Mile End – postcode district E1, more or less. Forest Gate is no more in the East End than Neasden is in the West End. I blame television.

GEORGE MACKIE.

...Although I agree with the sentiments of the First Drafts cartoon (1198), I feel compelled to point out that it was Grendel's mother who was the "slaaaag". Grendel himself was just a poor wretch of a child who was merely the product of his upbringing.

JASON HEHIR.

Sir,

I'm afraid I must out-pedant your pedantic correspondent Ian Thompson (Eye 1199). An altimeter reading in inches of mercury is three times more precise than one reading in millibars, not three times more accurate...

Yours in pedantry,
RALPH HOUSTON.

...I would like to join Ian Thompson in Pedants Corner (1199) and point out the error in his assertion that using inches of mercury is more accurate because it involves two decimal places.

A pressure of 1018 millibars is expressed just as accurately as one of 29.98 inches of mercury because both have four significant figures.

The mercury measurement could be said to be more sensitive because the recorded format can indicate a change of one part in 3000 as opposed to one in 1000, but this arises from the magnitude of the unit and not the number of decimal places.

PHIL THOMPSON.

Guilty as charged

Sir,

"The writing skills of Telegraph hacks don't seem too hot, either. The accompanying league table was headed 'distribution of reading acheivement 2006' (Eye 1199, p6).

"Chanting Great Western passengers beseiged bookshops throughout Britain..." (Eye 1199, p23).

Whoops!

Yours,
CHRIS HOLLOWAY,

Bristol.

Media, Writting and Production
BA (Hons) Full-time/Part-time
University of Bolton

Evil spell

Sir,

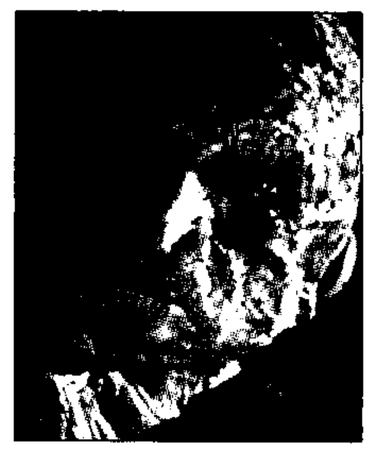
No sooner had you chuckled at the Daily Telegraph's dire writing attempts on your Street of Shame pages (1199), than the following piece on Andrew Marr and Dominic Lawson had me wondering what a "ditor" was.

I'm sure "diting" is a lot of fun, but now is the time for the firm hand of authority to assert itself and for a strong word with the aforementioned staff culprit – not to mention the proof-reader, who was equally lax in his duties. The silly cuns.

Keep up the good work,
IAN JAMES,

Via email.

Lookalike



Duke

Grendel

Sir,

Imagine my surprise to see the Duke of Edinburgh in 3D slaughtering defenceless Vikings. Are Grendel and HRH by any chance related?

LYNNE JOHNSON,

Skipton.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

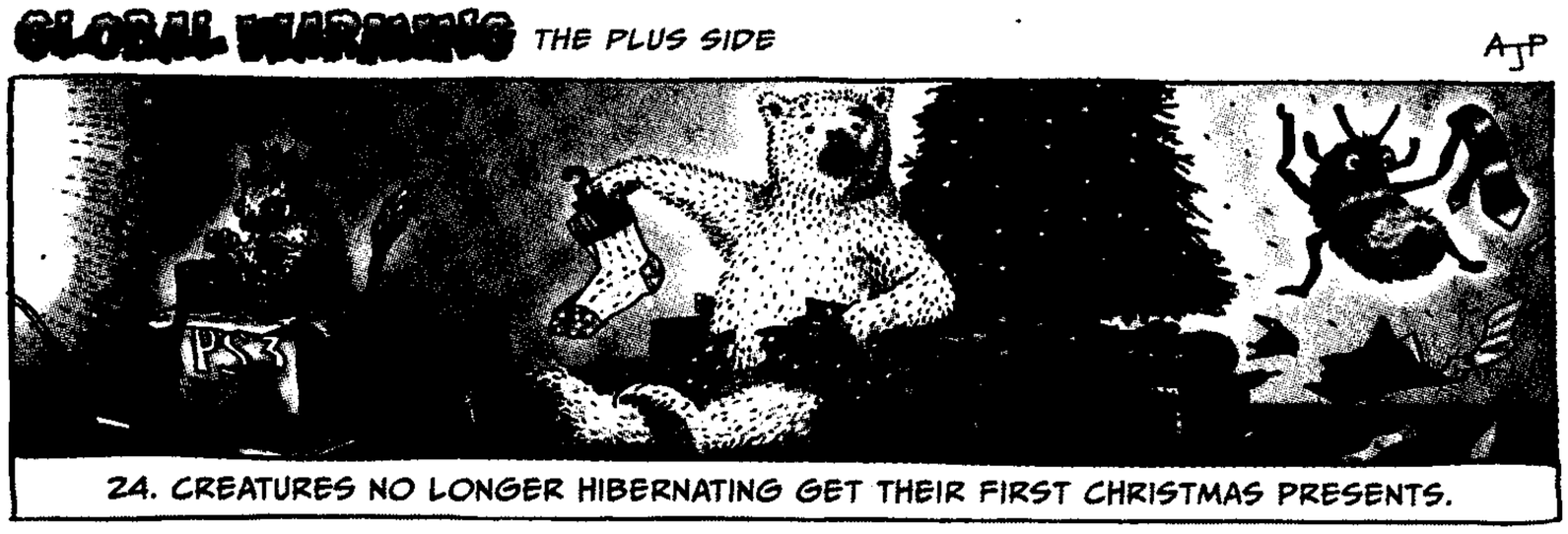
"For it to be a tight game, Marseille needed to score first and that never looked likely after Liverpool scored."
DAVID PLEAT, ITV
(Tom Beaty)

"All the shots have been over or above the bar."
STAN COLLYMORE, Radio 5 Live
(Rob Weale)

"Brahms only wrote three string quartets in his lifetime."
SARA MOHR-PIETSCH, Radio 3
(David Houston)

"He offers something different to what we haven't got."
SIMON GRAYSON, TalkSport
(Julian Thake)

"They [Arsenal] have a lot of games coming up in recent weeks."
LES FERDINAND, Setanta Sports
(Patrick Fagan)



Letter from **Kinshasa**
from Our Own Correspondent

KINSHASA continues to appal and amaze. Our president, Joseph Kabila, buoyed by his western-financed electoral victory (though Kinshasa and the west of the country rejected him decisively), is busy extending his personal financial network, generating new revenue streams that should flow to the state but instead go to him alone.

Some of this cash is spent on Kabila's presidential guard, the GSSP, which numbers a little over 2,000. They are better paid than the regular army, better equipped, don't answer to the armed forces commander-in-chief and are fanning out around the country. They can do what they like and know it, manning roadblocks to extort money from us ordinary Congolese, collecting protection money from businesses and generally throwing their weight around.

Western donors turn a blind eye to this gangsterism, concentrating mostly on the ever-turbulent east of the country, a violent buffer zone with our hostile neighbour Rwanda, where predatory militia and Congolese armed forces pillage and destroy the dwindling assets of the local population and – occasionally – fight each other. Donors are also concerned by China's growing arms exports to us, and the continued predilection of our government for massive off-budget spending, inherited from the Mobutu era.

Our prime minister Antoine Gizenga, though he remains a political legend, at over 80 can't take the pace. Lurking in the shadows meanwhile is Katumba Mwanke, the political equivalent of the GSSP, a prime ministerial eminence grise with no actual post in government. Mwanke was sacked from formal government in 2002 after being exposed in a UN expert panel report as a major player in the illegal exploitation of our fabulous natural resources. Yet he never really went away. He has stayed close to Kabila and played a brokering role in a series of bent multi-million dollar mining deals with western companies and was involved in a recent massive loan agreement with China, whereby it gives the Democratic Republic of Congo infrastructure and gets mining concessions in return.

These mining companies got a nasty shock last month when a leaked report of a government review of their contracts concluded that several should be annulled and others altered to the benefit of the state. The government publicly denied the leaked report was genuine while privately telling the rattled companies that in fact it was and "appropriate responses" were required.

Taking the hint, the companies pulled out their calculators and Kinshasa is now swarming with mining executives offering sweeteners to various ministers and their cronies, just as the government had hoped. The likely outcome is that none of the companies will lose their contracts – and especially not scrupulous outfits like ex-England cricketer Phil Edmond's highly controversial Central Africa Mining and Exploration Company (CAMEC). However, with so much at stake, the companies are not taking any chances.

Few Congolese are surprised by this turn of events. Indeed, for many this depressing state of affairs, intensified by the extreme difficulties most of us encounter simply getting by, confirms that these are the Last Days. Pentecostal churches are packed to the rafters. Pastors tell their flocks that Armgaddeon is close, that they are being tested and must stand firm.

Pastors incidentally do a nice sideline in child exorcism, with young "witches" brought to them, blamed for terrible household misfortunes. Many of these young unfortunates now believe they are indeed possessed, flying around at night preying on human flesh with other spirits.

Yet it's not all Apocalyptic gloom. Kinshasa fashion is as spectacular as ever, making the bustling city streets a visual delight; and the legendary music scene is vibrant too. Every week-end the nightclubs are heaving with les Kinois (and Kinoises) winding and grinding away as if there were no tomorrow. For the street children dancing outrageously outside, perhaps there won't be.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"I opened my first Modern Toilet diner in 2004," Wang Tzi-wei told reporters in his themed restaurant in Taipei, "and now have twelve outlets across Taiwan. As you can see, all one hundred seats are made from toilet bowls, and instead of sitting at tables, customers sit at glass-topped bathtubs, with toilet roll holders fixed above them, so they can wipe their hands and mouths after eating. Tableside ledges are adorned with piles of plastic turds, but what sets us apart is the food, because it really does look like turds.

"When I started out, we only served desserts. They oozed chocolate, contained berry chunks with telltale red streaks, and were served in miniature plastic toilet bowls. But then we expanded into gloopy brown meat

dishes, and a drinks list that describes cocktails as mixtures of piss, turds, and blood. Most of our customers are university students, because they are easily excited. They usually bring their cameras with them, because the place is so special. Every detail makes you think it's a bathroom, not a restaurant, which makes it fun to eat here."

Sixteen-year-old high school student Betty Tsai agreed, commenting. "It's really unusual, so special that it doesn't gross me out." But Lin Li-ju complained that "my son thought it was disgusting, and could barely finish his meal." *(Daily Times [Pakistan], 14/11/07. Spotter: Alastair Fairweather)*

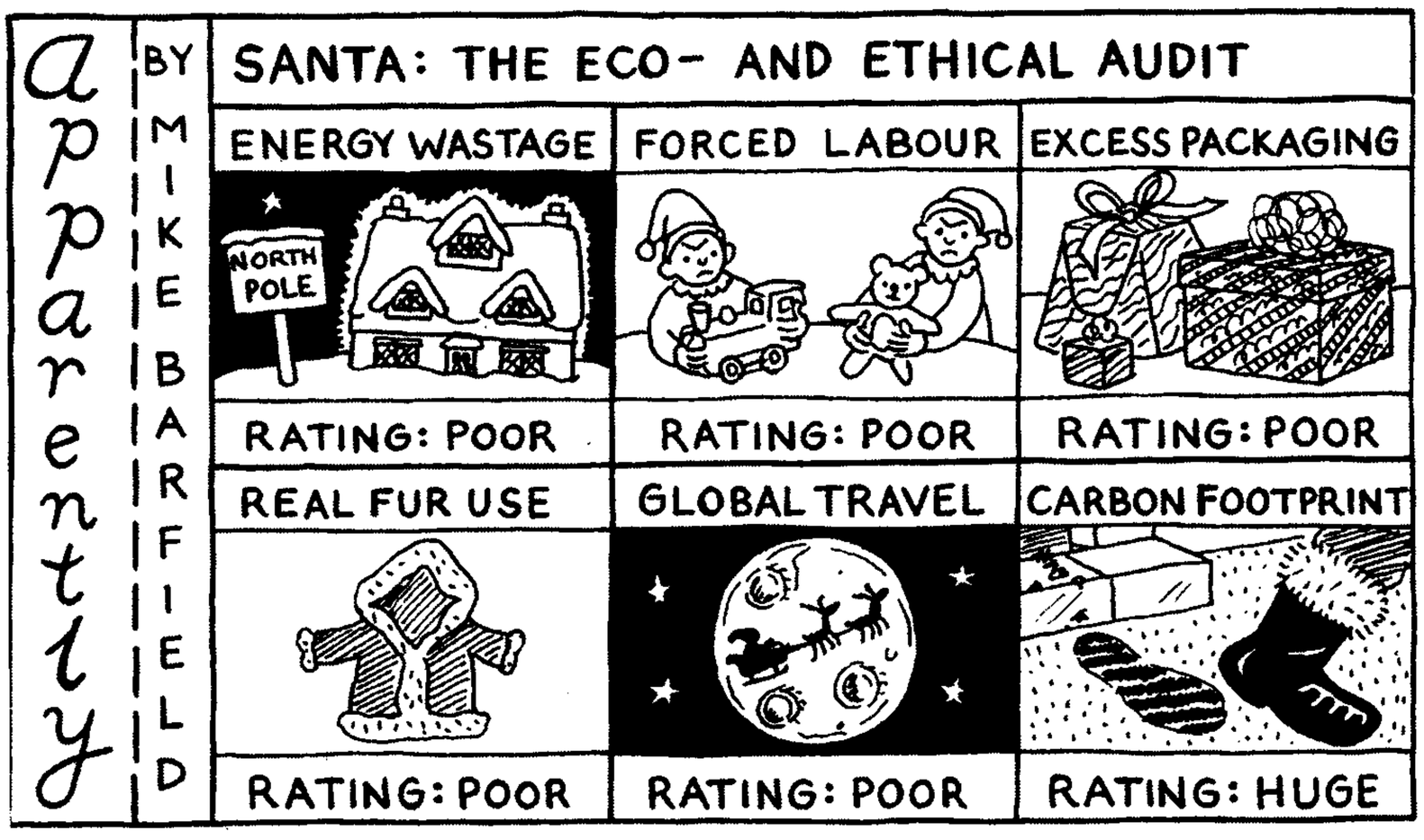
– o –

"These hair ties and rubber bands are selling very well, because they are cheap and colourful," dermatologist Yao Dong told reporters at the Hospital of Armed Police in Guangzhou, "and a bag of ten costs just 25 fen. They have become popular in local beauty salons, and sell well in markets, but they are a hazard to public health, because they are made from recycled condoms. The temperatures used in the recycling process are not high enough to destroy bacteria and viruses that the used condoms might be harbouring, and people could become infected with genital warts, herpes, or even AIDS, especially girls who hold the rubber bands or hair ties in their mouths while weaving their hair into plaits or buns. Condoms were introduced into China to halt the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, but ironically, they are now helping to spread the very infections they are supposed to prevent." (China Daily, 14/11/07. Spotter: Beni Benstead, Cambridge)

– o –

"When I was in my early twenties," fifty-seven-year-old Chong Siew Pit told a health conference in Kuala Lumpur, "I was hanging out with friends in a house in Seremban when a tiny mouse fell from the rafters onto the floor. I picked it up, and saw it was a newborn. Its eyes were not even opened, and out of curiosity I popped it into my mouth. It was pink and wriggling, so I took a glass of water to make it easier to swallow. I can still remember how soft, succulent, and smooth it felt as it went down. That was more than thirty years ago, but it remains fresh in my memory, because it was one of the most interesting experiences of my life. I'm convinced that swallowing baby mice has great medicinal benefits, especially in the curing of internal injuries. Since I swallowed my first one, I've never had a day's illness."

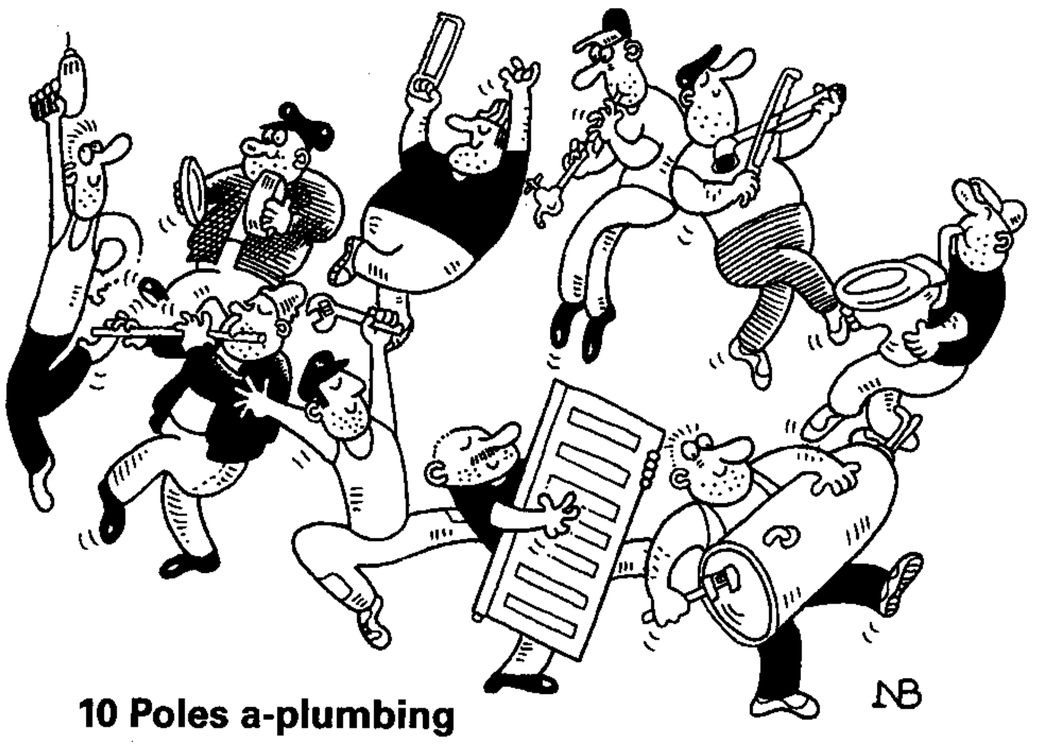
At the same conference, chef Agnes Chang revealed her recipe for a medicinal brew made from newborn birds. "The recipe for 'mao ji jiu' was given to me by my sister over thirty years ago, when I was about to give birth to my son. It's a brew made from newborn birds and herbs, and was popular in the old days, when people would eat anything they believed to be beneficial for their health. I took a tablespoon of the liquid every day for two weeks after giving birth, and my body always felt warm after swallowing it. I didn't feel squeamish, because there were no bits of bird floating in it, and I'm certain that the energy of those newborn birds transferred to me." *(New Straits Times, 18/10/07. Spotter: James Weatherly)*



"Oi! You lookin' at my bird?"

"We won't let it change our lives..."

Three Very Wise Men



10 Poles a-plumbing

"Go back to bed – it's only 4 am"

"Typical, it's only Boxing Day and the batteries have run out"

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 11

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

This has been the most historic week since I took over the leadership of Britain.

As you will know, I was granted the unique honour of being invited to Lisbon to sign the grand Treaty of Constitutional Solidarity and Federal Friendship with our European comrades *all on my own*.

All the other signatories had to queue up in the morning for an empty ritual signing ceremony staged simply for the benefit of the world's media.

But such importance did they attach to my contribution that I was allowed to arrive later with no fanfare or flummery to sign the treaty in a specially designated broom cupboard.

Imagine the former discredited leader Comrade Blair missing out on such an opportunity for grandstanding and self-glorification.

No, he would have strutted like a posturing popinjay, as he signed away all Britain's ancient hard-worn freedoms to an unscrupulous gang of neo-Merkelite-Sarkozyists.

How different was the approach of your new humble Supreme Leader as he quietly went about his task in the broom cupboard, tirelessly defending Britain's interests with his celebrated "Brown lines".

Not that this treaty is in itself of any real significance, as hysterical sections of the Murdochite media, supported by the wild-eyed Haguo-Cameronite reactionary fringe, have tried to make out.

No, it is entirely unimportant, as I have already explained, which is why I will not be wasting the time of the British people in pointless and futile exercises in pseudo-democratic bourgeois consultationism – ie, a referendum.

We must now focus all our energies on moving forward according to the principles of the Age of Change, and stop being diverted from our national task by the type of meaningless photo opportunity that was so beloved of the discredited former leader.

That is why, as you can see below, I flew this week to both Basra and Afghanistan to meet our courageous troops, in order to encourage them in their glorious and heroic task on behalf of the British people.

I was also able to bring them the welcome news that they will be coming home for Christmas or staying there for 50 years, according to which country I was in at the time.

On the home front, may I commend to you all the historic 10-Year Plan announced by Comrade Balls, our Commissar Responsible For Children, Pre-School Learners, Lifelong Skills, Organic Fat-Free School Dinners and the Gender-Neutral Lollipop Workers (see below).

Comrade Balls is congratulated by the Supreme Leader and commended for impementing the revolutionary principles of Brownist Changeism in an educational context.

I have therefore given him space here to present my ideas in person to the British adult and child community.

So much for claims that I am guilty of top-down one-person statism.

Comrade Balls writes:

Here is our revolutionary 10-Year Plan for rescuing British schools from ten wasted years of Blunkettist-Kellyite-Clarko failurism.

1. All schools must be good.
2. No schools must be bad.
3. Any schools which are found to be bad will be made good.
4. All children will be taught how to read and write and to be able to count up to ten.
5. This will be known as the Balls-Brownist "Three R Revolution".
6. All children will be taught a language, ie English.
7. All children will be required to attend school rather than play truant.
8. Parents will be expected to play some role in the bringing up of their children.
9. Children will not be permitted to bring knives or handguns into the classroom.
10. Every child will be given a copy of 'The Little Brown Book' for self-educational purposes.

These revolutionary principles will place British schools at the pinnacle of the world's educational league tables, and will play a key role in creating a world-class productive British workforce to assist our Polish comrades in building a British economy of which we can all be truly proud.

Comrade Ed Balls

Meanwhile the following measures will be implemented this week:

1. The building of three new nuclear super-prisons, each to house 25,000 prisoners, each providing enough electricity to power every home in Britain.
2. The construction of 2 million giant wind turbines round Britain's coastline, to blow away unwanted asylum-seeking birds who may well be carrying the deadly bluetongue avian flu virus.
3. The construction of a Museum of Britishness in London, to be known as "The British Museum". This will provide a showcase for British achievements, such as the Supreme Leader's institution of the Age of Change.
4. The taking of the Northern Rock Bank into state ownership, to be renamed the Bank of Prudence.
5. The declaration of a national public holiday on December 25 each year, when the British people will be encouraged to indulge in moderate and appropriate celebration, involving the sensible consumption of alcoholic beverages and proportionate contribution to the onward march of the British consumerist economy in the Age of Borrowing.

May I finally join Comrade Straw in unashamedly wishing you at this time of year a very "Happy Creditmas".

Yours Supremely,

Gordon Brown

Now only one farthing!

Daily Victorygraph

Dec. 1805

Visit Trafalgar Square when it's built – fun for all the family

LOVE RAT ADMIRAL IN LEGOVER STORM

By Our Naval Staff Kathy Lette-Me-In

Admiral Horatio Nelson, the one-eyed national security chief, has been revealed as a serial Lothario who has betrayed his long-suffering wife Lady Nelson with a series of secret trysts with glamorous brunette temptress Emma Hamilton.

Kiss me anyone!

The Victorygraph accepts of course that no impropriety took place between the distinguished hero and his good friend Lady Hamilton.

But last night sources close to Lady Nelson said: "Lord Nelson is a bastard. He could not keep his hand off that scheming trollop."

The Victorygraph says it is a scandal that this man is allowed to

exercise responsibility over Britain's defences at a time when we are engaged in a "war against terroir".

Full non-story p94.
Unfunny cartoon by Gilray p95.

Your Train Tonight: Mr Stephenson's Rocket will be arriving in 25 years' time.

Letter to the Editor

Names of the year

From the Rev. C.J. Barkworth.

Sir, As is customary, I have recorded the most popular names of boys and girls from your Births column in the past year. They are as follows:

Boys	Girls
1. Mohammed	Amy
2. Teddy	Kirsty
3. Arguido	Posh
4. Avram	Scary
5. Cameron	Baby
6. Rhydian	Other One
7. Brucie	Kylie
8. Parky	Dannii
9. Wossy	Mariella
10. Avian	Binge

The name Gordon initially appeared but then rapidly went out of fashion.

THE REV. C.J. BARKWORTH, The Old Windfarm, Dunwarmin', Somerset.

THAT BALI DECLARATION IN FULL

1. Something must be done.
2. Someone must do it.
3. But not us obviously.

Signed by all countries in the world except for the US.

The Secret Diary of Sir John Major KG aged 64 3/4

Sunday a.m.

I am not inconsiderably pleased to be invited on the Andrew Marr TV show which is like the David Frost Show except with Andrew Marr rather than David Frost. But, as I pointed out to my wife Norman, unlike David Frost, Andrew Marr does not have a breakfast cereal named after him. "Oh no," she replied, "but he does have a chocolate bar named after him. Oh yes." This was to my mind a foolish remark, neither funny or helpful.

On the show Mr Marrs asked me if in my judgement Mr Blair had been right to accuse my government of sleaze. I was in no small measure incandescent with rage and I said to Mr Marrs, "How dare Mr Blair accuse me of sleaze when his government have a sleaze record second only to my own?"

Mr Marrs was not inconsiderably silenced by my admonition. His only response was to laugh, hold his sides and ask me if I fancied a curry. This was a very silly remark since we had only just eaten our very pleasant breakfast of Golden Grahams (not Frosties) in the BBC Canteen.

What You Won't Be Taking The Children To This Christmas

THAT STEPHEN FRY PANTO IN FULL

★CINDERFELLA★

(Enter Buttocks)

Buttocks: Hello boys and boys!

Sandi Toksvig *(with moustache)*: Hello girls and girls!

Audience: It's behind you!

Buttocks: That's the way I like it!

(Enter Prince Charming carrying a slipper. Enter Ugly Sisters)

First Ugly Sister: Let's see if we can *slip* this one in!

Second Ugly Sister: Ooh! Is size important?

Prince Charming: It is to me, ducky!

(Enter Kevin Spacey, artistic director of the Old Dic Theatre)

Spacey: It's all about bums and seats!

Prince: Cheeky!

Audience: Isn't this a bit crude?

Spacey: Oh no it isn't!

Audience: Oh yes it is!

Prince: Ooh! Er! My pumpkin is swelling up! Time for a sing-song!

(Entire cast sing well-loved traditional panto song "FRY-MCA" by the Hampstead Village People)

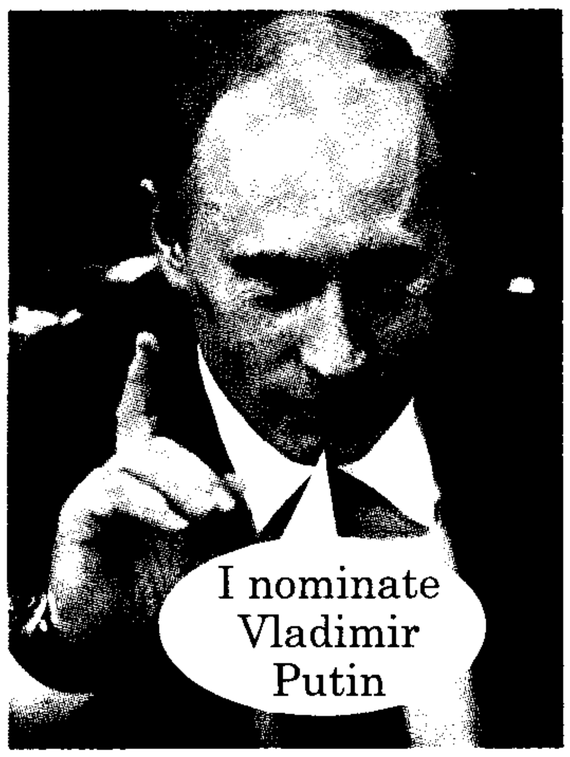
All *(with actions)*: FRY-MCA! etc.

(Interval during which half the audience rush for toilet, the rest for the exit)

Do you think this panto reinforces gay stereotypes? Or do you think it is ironically affirmative of alternative lifestyles? Send your views to www.pinkpanto.org

Scrooge's Nightmare: The Ghost of Christmas Past

PUTIN NAMES NEW LEADER



NEWS CORPORATION ANNOUNCES CHANGES

by Our Media Reporter **Elizabeth Murdoch**

IN A surprise move today, Rupert Murdoch announced that James Murdoch will take control of News Corporation's operations in the UK, Europe and Asia.

"James combines two rare talents – not only does he have a natural gift for being my son, he also has a proven track record of being my son over a number of years," a delighted Rupert Murdoch told reporters. "Whilst a number of the other candidates had far better CVs, none could match James's experience of being my son."

How These Major Changes Affect News Corporation

Before

Rupert Murdoch tells his newspaper editors which political party to support.

After

Rupert Murdoch tells his newspaper editors which political party to support.

CHRISTMAS PICK

FILMS

St Cakes The Movie (2007)

RAUNCHY remake of the original 1954 Ealing classic. This time the boys of St Cakes run riot setting up a crackhouse in the boys' dormitory. Russell Brand takes the Alastair Sim role as headmaster Mr Kipling and Jordan takes the Joyce Grenfell role of Mrs Titzowt, the East European hockey mistress turned lap dancer.

Watch out for the girls from St Crumpets, the sister independent fee-paying school, in suspenders and stockings who plan to get some publicity for themselves and *(That's enough film, Ed.)*

They Flew To Bruges (2007)

ANIMATED remake by Pixel of the 1947 black and white classic. In this version the RAF (Rat Air Force) go on a secret mission to Bruges to blow up the Warfarin Factory on the Rühr.

Wing Commander "Ratty" Rattington-Smith (voiced by Johnny Depp) leads the band of misfits against the might of chief nasty Adolf Catler (voiced by Sir Ian McKellan). Watch out for sexy rodent Nurse Rata Hayworth (voiced by Cameron Diaz) taking on the Celia Johnstone role.

Eye-rating (geddit!): Cheesy.

TV

Xmas Holiday Saturday (Repeat)

The Jonathan Creek Mysteries No. 94

A FAMOUS actor goes mad and bites the ear of a homeless man outside a fashionable Soho club. Creek is called in to solve the mystery, which he does in record time by discovering that the culprit is himself. Expert detective work soon reveals the motive – at the time of the assault the actor was incredibly drunk.

Cast in Full

Jonathan Creek...Jonathan *Creek*
Vagrant.....Alan Davies

ITV2 Tuesday 9.00pm

Wags Boutique

SIX hard-as-nails gangsters set up a boutique in London's fashionable Covent Garden to flog off all the Rolexes, fine art, jewellery and flat screen TVs they've recently stolen at gunpoint from the WAGs of the Liverpool first eleven.

ROYAL VARIETY SHOW

THE BROON-ITES
THE SEASONAL SCOTS GETTING A STUFFING! Fountain and Jamieson
WELL THIS IS A RICHT LOAD O' FIZZER BOWK!
AYE, IT'S NAE BONNIE, WEDGIE-BROON!
FAT CHANCE WE'LL BE BAWSED TONIGHT...
NAE MUSIC, NAE PRESENTS, GRUEL FER LUNCH, AND I KEN THA' PA CHRISTMAS IS JUST YON ALISTAIR DARLING WITH A STICKY ON BEARD...
HENRY DAVIES
WHAT I WANT LIST
MY LITTLE PONY, BARBIE MAKE-UP SET, PAY INCREASE FOR POLICE
Q HERE FOR SANTA
EMPTY
WE SHOULD NE'ER GOT GORDON TAE ORGANISE THA' XMAS PARTY!
WELL, TAE BE FAIR, WE DID TELL HIM TO HAULD IT IN THA' ONE PLACE WE THOUGHT HE COULD DAE A GUID JOB...
CHERUBIC CHOPS AGLOW WITH FESTIVE FORGIVENESS
IF AH' DIDN'T KEN BETTER, AH'D SWEAR THERE WAS BOOZE IN ONE O' THESE WOODEN ROUNDY THINGS...
JOCKSHIRE BREWERY
CHRISTMAS, JINGLES
...AND HELP MA BOAB!
JOCKSHIRE BROON ALE

THE GNOMOVATIONS C

At long last it's here!

THE INCREDIBLE

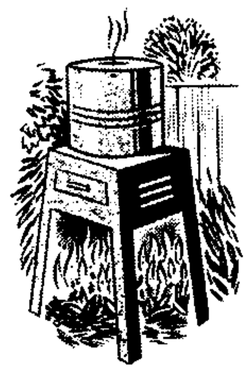
EYE-PHONE

Has the following amazing features: ☎ Allows you to ring people up ☎ **Accepts incoming calls** ☎ Gives you instant access to the entire UK phone network ☎ **Stores an amazing one ring tone (Brrring!! Brrring!!)** ☎ Unique touch-sensitive controls (push buttons) ☎ **Unlike rival phones with a similar name THIS ONE ACTUALLY WORKS!**

"Unbelievable value at only £199.99," says Steve Jobs of Neasden

Help Save Our Planet with the

NOCARBONFIRE



EXPERTS have proved that the average back-garden bonfire can produce up to 400,000 tonnes of carbon emissions – the equivalent of 2700 car exhausts or 49 Jumbo Jets. Easily erected, the NOCARBONFIRE captures and disposes of all harmful pollutants leaving your smoke 100% carbon-free. *"I cannot recommend it too highly,"* says TV's **Alan Titchmarsh.**

● Plays theme tune from TV's *Planet Earth.*

£99,999.99p (plugs into any household socket)

TERROR-SPECS

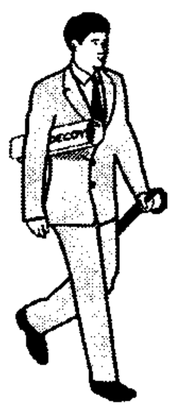
This Christmas why not treat a loved one to a pair of 'Terror-Specs'? Simply place the 'Terror Specs' on your nose and everyone you see will instantly become a terror suspect. Terry the Milkman, Joe the Butcher and even Barry the Greengrocer will all suddenly take on the swarthy, sinister look of the al-Q'aida plotter.

"These American Terror-Specs are brilliant." says Gordon B., Westminster. **£9.99**

● Say Goodbye to Free London Newspaper Misery with the incredibly lifelike

DAILY DECOY

SIMPLY carry your *Daily Decoy* under your arm and – hey presto! – free paper distributors will leave you completely alone!! Looks just like the real thing, fools everyone and yet only costs **£29.99**!!



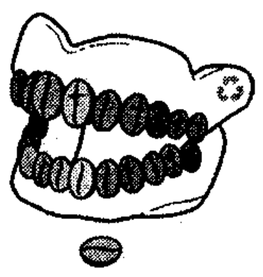
● Now you're free to walk along the street unhindered!

**Made from long-lasting sustainable eco-pulp from the Amazon Rainforest.*

AT LAST! **ORGANIC**

DENTURES

FOR YEARS responsibly minded denture wearers have been asking, "Why can't I have organic dentures?" And now they can. **Orgodents™** are 100% Fair Trade organic dentures made from recycled banana trees and coffee plants in Colombia.

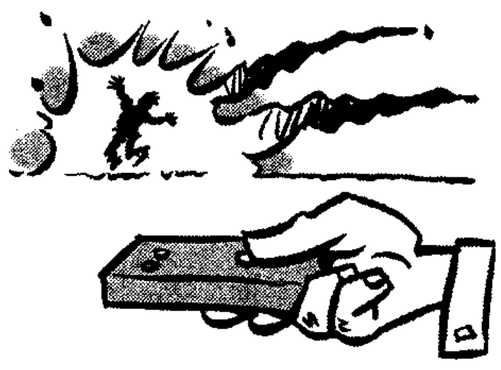


"Now you can have really Green teeth!" says top Eco-expert Zac Goldsmith.

Full set £299.99

Beat the identity thief with this self-destruct wallet

WALL-BOOM!



If your wallet goes missing you can cause it to explode – thanks to a handy remote-controlled detonator with a 100-mile range. In an instant credit cards and ID materials are destroyed – along with the thief!

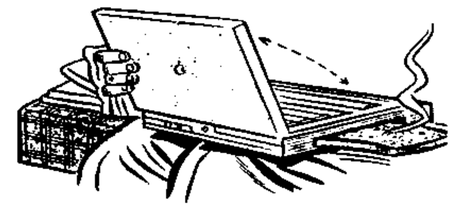
£789.99 *(batteries extra)*

First time in the UK!

The amazing

LAPTOASTER

● Busy commuters will love this amazing development in Taiwanese laptop technology. Looks like an ordinary laptop yet incorporates a state-of-the-art toaster which accommodates two slices of average-size toast. Ideal for your working breakfast!



Colours: *Conrad Black, Michael White, Grey Gowrie*

£2,439.99p

The Lucky Rock of the North

For hundreds of years the inhabitants of the distant county of Applegarth have sworn by the magical powers of the Lucky Rock of the North.

Wearers believe that just by owning a small chunk of this precious substance they will be guaranteed prosperity for ever!

£24 billion

COLOURS: Red (In The)

Terrify your friends and family this Xmas with the

DAVID MILIBAND Horror Mask

***Hours of fun* as you frighten everyone into thinking that you are the Foreign Secretary and you are going to defend Britain's interests in Europe!**

99p

SMOKERS!

Say Goodbye to Freezing Fag Breaks with the

Portable Personal Patio Heater!

LOOKS just like a hat but generates the equivalent of a 3kw electric fire. Guaranteed to keep you nice 'n' warm as you stand outside your office puffing on your favourite cigarette! *(Weighs only 25 kilos, unsuitable for children).*

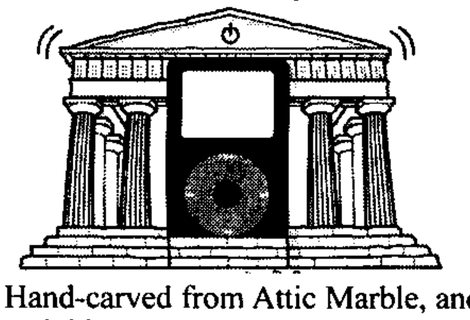
£399.99 ***(includes refill gas cylinder).*** **Plays theme from BBC TV's Strictly Come Dancing.**

Gnomes Past

Take a trip into Ancient Greece with the

HELLENIC iPOD DOCK

This authentic-style Greek artefact is closely modelled on an original carving, dedicated to the God of Music, Appollos, discovered by archaeologists in the ancient city of Nano.



Hand-carved from Attic Marble, and weighing no more than 100 kilos, the Hellenic iPod Dock™ transports you back to the Golden Age of Athenian Democracy as you listen to the Arctic Monkeys. ■ ***STYLES: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian.*** **£2,342.99**

ATALOGUE XMAS 2007

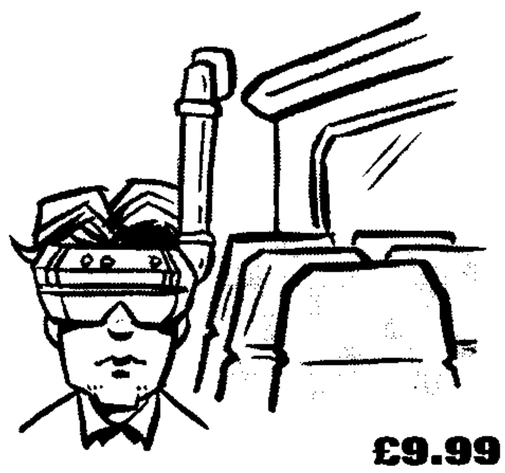
Train travellers!

There'll always be a seat for you with the

SEAT-O-SCOPE

With today's high-backed train seats you can't see where there's a free one. Thanks to this handy periscope, you'll spot an empty seat in a flash.

● **Now you'll be sitting pretty!**



£9.99

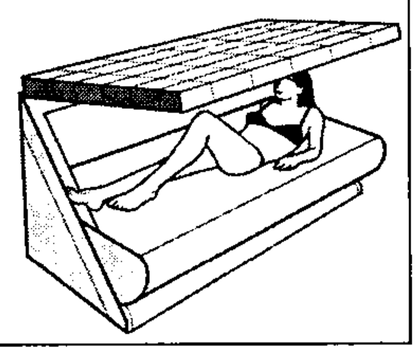
ECO-LOVERS *NEW* FROM DUBAI

THE SOLAR-POWERED SUNBED

At last you can feel *green* whilst turning brown! This breakthrough in solar bed technology allows guilt-free bronzing all year round!*

£29,999.99

(solar panels not included)



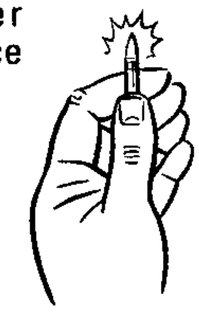
*Seasonal conditions permitting

Flatulence Sufferers!

No more red faces from embarrassing escaped wind with new

SUPPOSITONE™

This miniature device is activated by released internal gas and emits a convincing mobile ring tone – which both covers up any unwanted noise and gives you an excuse to leave business meeting/dinner party/jury service to "take a call"!



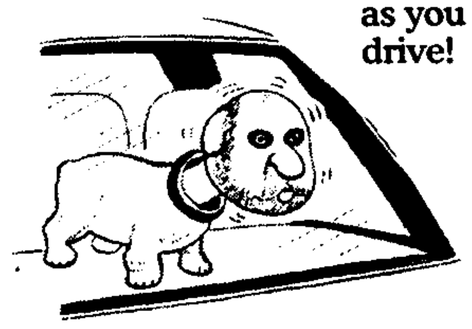
CHOICE OF TONES:
old-fashioned telephone,
Strauss waltz,
Crazy Frog.

£35.99 *Batteries extra. Money-Back Guarantee*

CAR LOVERS!

The 'Nodding Yentob'™

This amazing novelty car toy from Taiwan sits happily on your rear window ledge and performs non-stop 'noddies' as you drive!

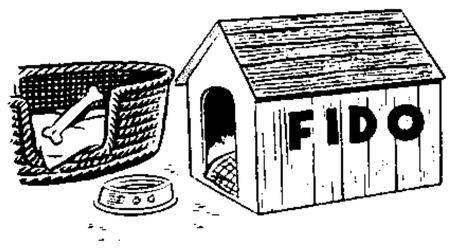


Imagine! Hours of fun as you sit on the M25 while the BBC's bearded arts supremo agrees with everything you say!

35p (inc p&p)

Plays theme tune from ITV's The South Bank Show

Don't let Fido miss out on the property boom with



Buy-to-Let DOG KENNELS

● We are offering you a chance to help your pet invest in the fastest growing sector of the market – 2nd Dog Homes For Rent!

Full brochure available now from Gnome Fidelity Development plc, Box 7432, Grand Canine Islands. Send only £79.99 now!

Be the envy of your friends with the

72in PLASMA RADIO

Why listen to your favourite programmes on a tiny transistor when you can experience 21st-century-style listening on a massive scale! The Archers have never been BIGGER!

£5,599.99

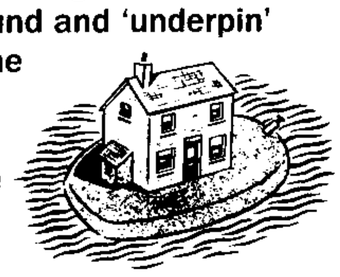
Choice of finish: *Joss Stone, Ron Wood, Kid Rock*

CLIMATE CHANGE ALERT!

Worried about the ice caps melting and your home being submerged by Arctic seas? Not now, thanks to

HOME-A-FLOAT™

Our expert engineers will come round and 'underpin' your home with a self-inflatable giant rubber dinghy. Takes only seconds to activate, and you will be safe as houses!



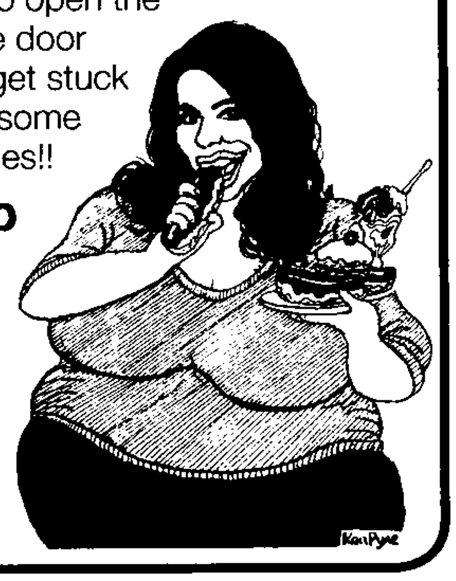
CHOICE OF STYLES: Tudor, Art Deco, Pebbledash

£899,999.99 (plus VAT)

THE NIGELLA FRIDGE MAGNET

Humorous but helpful fridge magnet reminding you not to get too thin! Ideal for all women who are worried about being too thin – Nigella gently reminds you to open the fridge door and get stuck in to some calories!!

99p (box of ten)

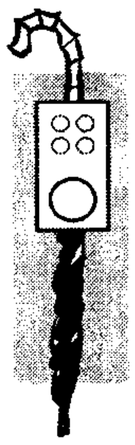


Say goodbye to lost brolly misery with

BROLL-A-LARM™

How many times have you left your favourite umbrella on the train, bus or taxi?

Never again, thanks to the umbrella wizards at Croatia's Institute of Umbrellology who have developed this remarkable Digital Reminder Technology.



Programmed with the message of your choice, the Broll-Aw-larm alerts you seconds before you leave empty-handed.

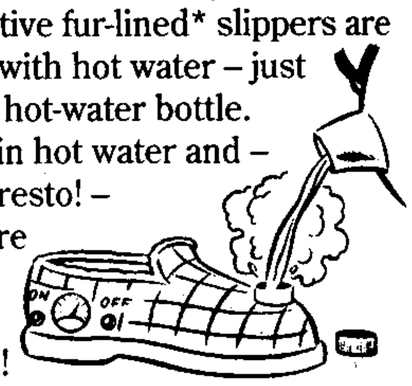
Choice of voices: *Stephen Fry, Dame Judi Dench, Ricky Gervais.*

£99.99 (batteries not included)

Hot-water bottles – and now

HOT-WATER SLIPPERS!

New from Norway, these attractive fur-lined slippers are filled with hot water – just like a hot-water bottle. Pour in hot water and – hey presto! – feet are nice 'n' warm!



Colours: **Rabbi Blue, Cilla Black, Candida Lycett-Green**

99p per slipper (£2 per pair)

**Fur is not real but made from synthetic polytoynbeelene and approved for slipper use by Stella McCartney*

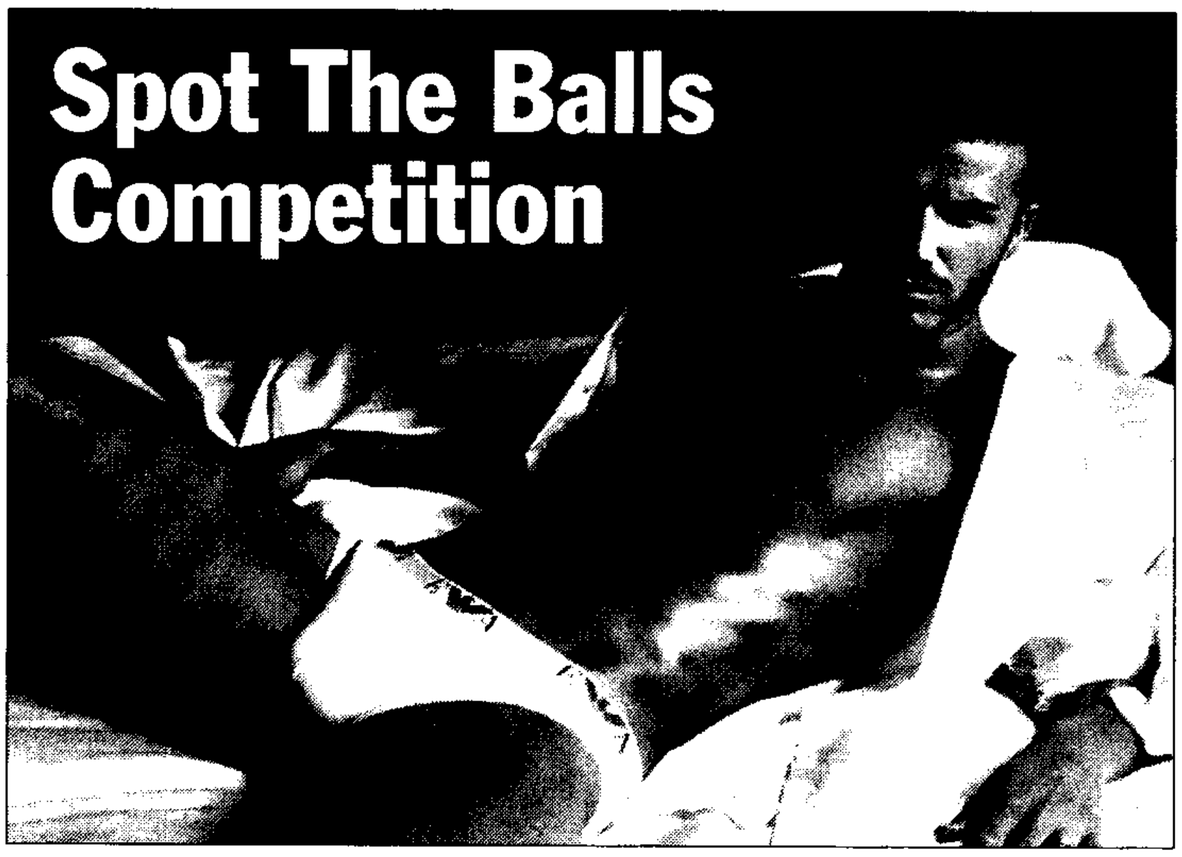
Renewable Energy Lovers!

THE BATH BARRAGE

Make your bathwater generate its own hydro-electric power supply! Simply get in the bath and the waves created will be turned by the Bath Barrage into enough electricity to heat the water!

● ***COLOURS:*** *Red Ken, Phillip Green.* ● ***Plays Blondie's 'The Tide Is High'*** **£7,899**

EYE XMAS QUIZ



Simply place an X where you think *(Yes, we get the picture. Ed.)*

MAN CAUGHT 'PRETENDING TO BE ALIVE'

by Our Fraud Staff **John Darwintrouble**

A 57-YEAR-OLD man fooled millions by faking his own life, police revealed yesterday.

Gordon Brown was found washed up earlier this year but then maintained an elaborate charade of not being dead in the water.

Canoe Labour

Brown's only mistake was to have his photograph taken with Harriet Harman earlier this year. The photograph clearly showed that contrary to what everyone had been told, Brown was cold and lifeless and his career was clearly over.

Friends and relatives were furious that they had been duped.

"We thought he was alive and kicking. Imagine how silly we feel now that we know he was dead all along."

A spokesperson for Gordon Brown however, claimed that his client was suffering from amnesia and had no memory of his last ten years working for Tony Blair.

"It is all a terrible misunderstanding," he said *(cont. p.94)*

On other pages: Ded Zeppelin – Elderly Men Found Alive on Stage in O_2 Stadium

World Of Football

NEW ENGLAND MANAGER CHOSEN

by PHIL SPACE

THE FA has finally decided who will be the best man to be derided in the tabloid press in two years time, after another World Cup debacle by appointing Fabio Capello as the new England manager.

"The fact he is Italian, wears spectacles and has a fruity wife makes him the perfect target for the sub-editors, with gems such as "Fabio's Pasta his Best", "Sorry Fab, we 'Specs a whole lot better'" and "Crap-ello – or rather Crap-ello-and-goodbye!"

"It's this kind of nimble punnery and fancy abuse that give us all something to look forward to," said one *(cont. p94)*.

'I Salute These Geniuses'

Says Max Hastings

IT IS not often in one's lifetime that one can honestly say that one has been present at an epoch-making event.

But last Sunday, as I sat in a stadium along with three million other hard-core Led Zep fans, there was no doubt in my mind that I was watching history in the making.

They are older now of course than their photographs on my treasured album covers yet the years have dealt lightly with Messrs Plant, Page *et al* and their brilliance is undimmed.

From the opening riff of the legendary Whole Lotta Love to the final exuberant chords of Stairway To Heaven, we were all enraptured by this apotheosis of rock 'n roll, the like of which the word has even known.

Even such luminaries as the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and even the Beatles themselves pale into insignificance beside these titans of the electric guitar.

Let me say simply this. They rocked. And I wept.

© Max Hastings, Mat D'Ancona and everyone else, 2007.

Those Xmas Bestsellers in Full

1. The World According to Clarkson by Jeremy Clarkson

2. Clarkson On Clarkson by J. Clarkson

3. Does Jeremy Clarkson Eat Wasps? New Scientist

4. Why Don't Jeremy Clarkson's Feet Freeze? by Mick O'Hare

5. The Guinness Book of Clarksons. Guinness Books

6. Is It Me or Is Everything Clarkson? Shite Books

7. "I Know Jeremy Clarkson" by Richard Hammond

8. "So Do I" by James May

9. "He Was On QI Once" by Stephen Fry

No 94. "I Know Clarkson Too But I'm Not On Television" by AA Gill

(That's enough best-sellers)

the PREMIERSH*TS

NEW BRITISH CAROLS FOR 2007

I saw no ships
Come sailing by,
Come sailing by
Come sailing by
I saw no ships
Come sailing by,
Because they've all
Been axed in the
Defence cuts.

LATE NEWS

NEW-LOOK AMBULANCES

NHS BOSSES have defended plans to replace traditional ambulances manned by a two-man crew with solo response vehicles known as 'hearses'.

"In a wide variety of emergency call-outs, these hearses, which are manned by one highly-trained funeral director, save the NHS vast sums of money, as they ensure that the patient doesn't enter the hospital system," said an NHS *(cont. p. 94)*

STANDARD OF RAIL SERVICES NOT SCHEDULED TO RISE

COMMUTERS were once again hit by bad news as the rail companies announced that the standard of their services will not be rising in line with January's fare increases.

A rail spokesman said: "Some of our customers are insisting that train services should actually improve the more money they pay – this is clearly absurd, and just shows that they aren't living in the real world."

WOMEN ATTRACTED TO RICH MEN SHOCK

A STUNNING report published today claimed that women are attracted to wealthy men.

ON OTHER PAGES ● Pope Drawn Towards Catholicism ● Fish Attracted To Water.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Karlheinz Stockhausen

So. Farewell
Then Karlheinz
Stockhausen.

Famous modern
Composer.

All together
Now –

Bing. Bang!
Three-minute silence.
Knock. Knock.
Beep.
Plonk. Bang!
Whirrr...

I hope I
Have got
This right.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

NEASDEN CENTRAL POLICE STATION

A Notice To All Our Customers

Owing to industrial action by members of the police officers' union NACA (the National Alliance of Constabulary Associations), the following services will not be offered to the public until further notice.

1. No emergency calls of any kind will be responded to.

2. No officers will be patrolling the streets of Neasden to protect the citizens from miscreants and to uphold law and order.

3. There will be no investigations of any minor crimes occurring in the Neasden Police area, such as car theft, burglary, mugging, rape, GBH or murder.

4. Community Support Officers will not be available to supervise public drownings.

As is clear from the above, it will be business as usual from your local police.

NEASDEN POLICE: "Making Your Day"

CHRISTMAS SHORTAGE WARNING

by Our Christmas correspondent **Nat Ivity** and **Will Hutton**

THERE were fears today that articles about the most popular toys this Christmas which are in short supply, will be in short supply this Christmas.

"These articles are extremely popular as back page fillers, which newspaper editors can play with at this time of year" said one hack, "but this year the editors are fighting each other to get their hands on them, we can't churn them out quick enough to satisfy the demands."

However Britain's newspaper editors sought to calm readers' fears of a shortage, saying come the last week of December there would be more than enough of these eagerly sought after articles which fill all those pages of their papers which previously had news in them.

"Scarper! It's the Bill!"

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A TRADITIONAL BRITISH CHRISTMAS - BRING ON THE TURKEY !
OK !
DETAILED POLICY STATEMENT
HIDE THE MISTLETOE ! BORIS HAS ARRIVED ! !
ER...ON SECOND THOUGHTS, BRING ON THE CRACKERS ! !
GREETINGS, EARTHMAN FROM REDWEIRD AND ZAC
ON THIRD THOUGHTS, LET'S THINK OF THOSE LESS FORTUNATE THAN OURSELVES ...
XMAS CHEER
GORDON ! ! ! HA! HA! HA!
ALTOGETHER READERS...
CAROLS
SILENT RIGHT
GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLE OIKS

Pinter Sells Papers To Nation For £1 Billion

by Our Heritage Staff **Professor Norman Stonehenge**

IN WHAT was described as "the literary coup of the century", the British Library has paid £1 billion for a box of old pieces of paper from Sir Harold Pinter's attic.

Among the priceless manuscripts included in this unique literary collection is a letter which will help future scholars to understand how the Nobel prize-winning playwright managed to get so much money for his archive.

The Priceless Pinter Manuscript

To the Director of the British Library

I am giving you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire a priceless heritage item for your collection, at the giveaway price of a mere £1 billion.

Among the highly important memorabilia contained in this very wonderful archive are the following items:

1 note to milkman reading "Two pints please, chum".

1 draft of letter to President Bush beginning "You fucking warmongering bastard".

1 scorecard Surrey v. Lancashire at the Oval, July 16, 1955 (second day) signed by a member of the ground staff.

1 love letter in the author's own hand to Lady Magnesia Freelove (later Lady Pinter). Contains adult material.

Plus assorted paperclips, biro refills and other valuable literary miscellanea.

You would be mad, chummie, not to snap up this bargain offer of the millennium, which might otherwise have to go to the University of New Dworkin, Mass.

So act quickly and send your cheque by return of post.

Yours faithfully,
Sir Harold Pinter OM.

Turner Prize Given To Bore Man

by Cur Arts Correspondent
Richard Dormouse

THE world's most coveted art prize was last night awarded to Mark Wally, for a two hour video showing him dressed up as a bore.

Wally, 36, put on a bore suit and was interviewed by hundreds of journalists, talking about himself. "When I act out the role of a bore," he said, "I am making a statement about what it is to be a bore."

What do you think of the Bore Man? Is it art or is it just boring? Are you pro- or anti- bore?

Comment now on our online Boreblog at www.filluptomorrowsindependent.co.uk

Sensational Diana Letter Presented To Inquiry

Drama at inquest Day 994

THERE WERE gasps of amazement when Sir Michael Mansfee QC presented the jury with an intimate letter written by the late Princess of Wales only a few days after she died.

The letter was written to Dodi in the most affectionate terms and revealed that they had been secretly married for years.

The hearing continues...

That Letter In Full

KENSINGTON PALACE

My darling-fuggin Dodi, you are a fuggin' good looking guy just like your Dad and I'm going to have your fuggin' baby King Mohammed the fuggin' First of England. By the way Harrods is a fuggin' great place to shop!

your loving wife
Diana AL Fayed
signed in her absence

Advertisement

THE AMY WINEHOUSE CHRISTMAS ALBUM

Featuring all your favourite family Yuletide hits, including

Rudolph The White-nosed Reindeer

Ding Dong Merrily I'm High

O Come All Ye Faithful (But I Won't Be There)

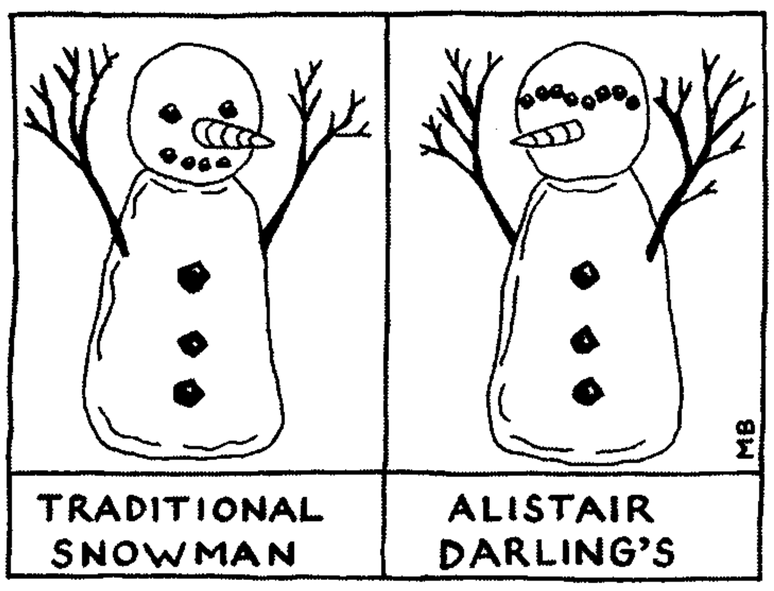
Silent Night (concert cancelled)

Dead To The World!

The First No-show

All I Want For Christmas (is my husband out of jail)

Single Bells (Single Bells, OK make it a double)



Advertisement

Spare A Thought For Her This Christmas

AS YOU sit with your loved ones enjoying all the happiness of this holiday period, Barbara faces the future alone, with nothing.

Barbara can only look back on her memories of the days when everything was so different.

Please help.

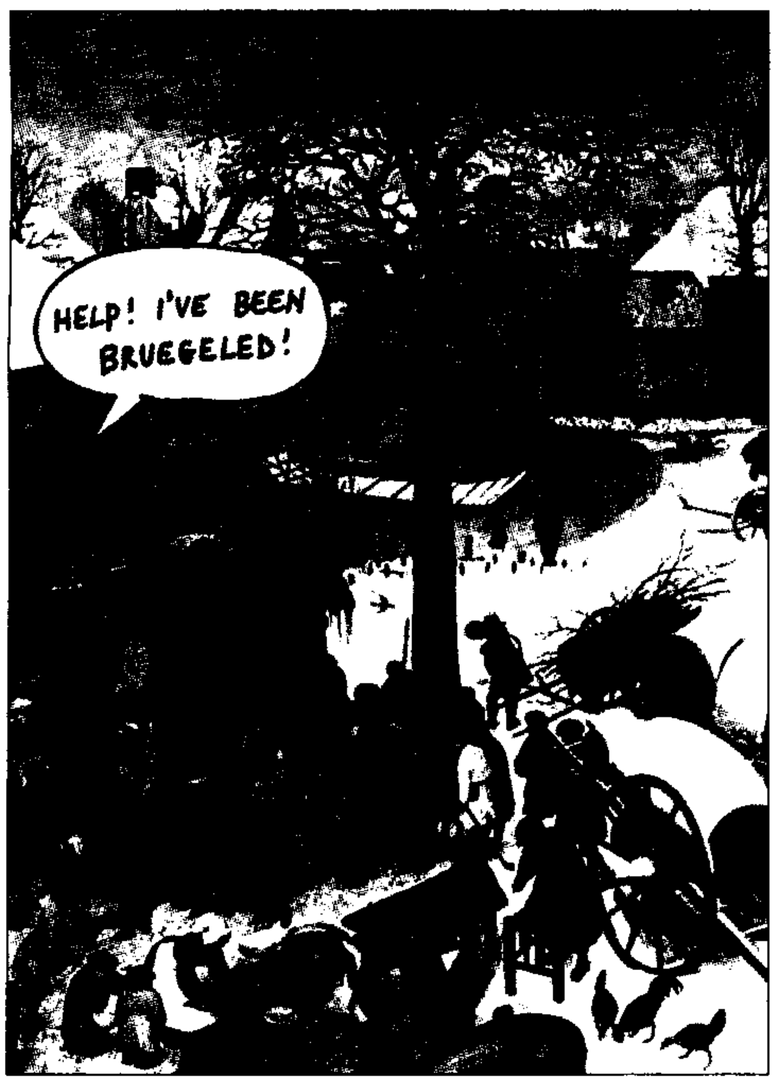
☺ £1,000 will buy Barbara a new pair of shoes.

☺ £2,000 will buy her two pairs of shoes.

☺ £10,000 will buy her a handbag.

☺ £2 million will buy her a new private jet with its own personal toilet.

Send money now to Andrew Roberts, Hon. Treasurer, AMIELNESTY INTERNATIONAL, PO Box 94, London W1



Lines Written On The Imprisonment Of Lord Black Of Crossharbour

By William Rees-McGonagall

'Twas nearly in the year two thousand and eight
That Lord Conrad Black learned at last of his fate.
Said Amy the Judge, amidst many loud cheers.
You will go to prison for six and a half years.

The crowd all applauded this draconian sentence
Which was given because Lord Black had shown no sign of repentance.
Only from one person came the sound of boos –
It was his wife Barbara wearing one of her many pairs of shoes.

So ended the career of the great Canadian tycoon.
Whose mighty empire had come crashing doon.
Said the judge to the errant British Lord,
"You've been found guilty of 'a most wicked fraud'."

Who could have foreseen such a tragic end,
To the career of someone who had once been Mrs Thatcher's friend.
The press baron from Toronto had burst upon the English scene
Where he quickly met everyone, including Her Majesty the Queen.

The great and the good flocked to his lavish receptions,
Quite unaware of their host's shady financial deceptions.
The world all gasped at his astonishing wealth,
Little realising that he had acquired it by dishonest stealth.

Jewellery, jets and houses – nothing seemed beyond his reach.
Not even a 50-room mansion in Florida's Palm Beach.
Conrad and Barbara did nothing by half.
They even acquired London's mighty *Daily Telegraph.*

Black was now one of the great figures of the age,
Bestriding like a colossus the social and political stage.
Appropriately he moved his papers into Canary Wharf,
A tower so high that the rest of London it did dwarf.

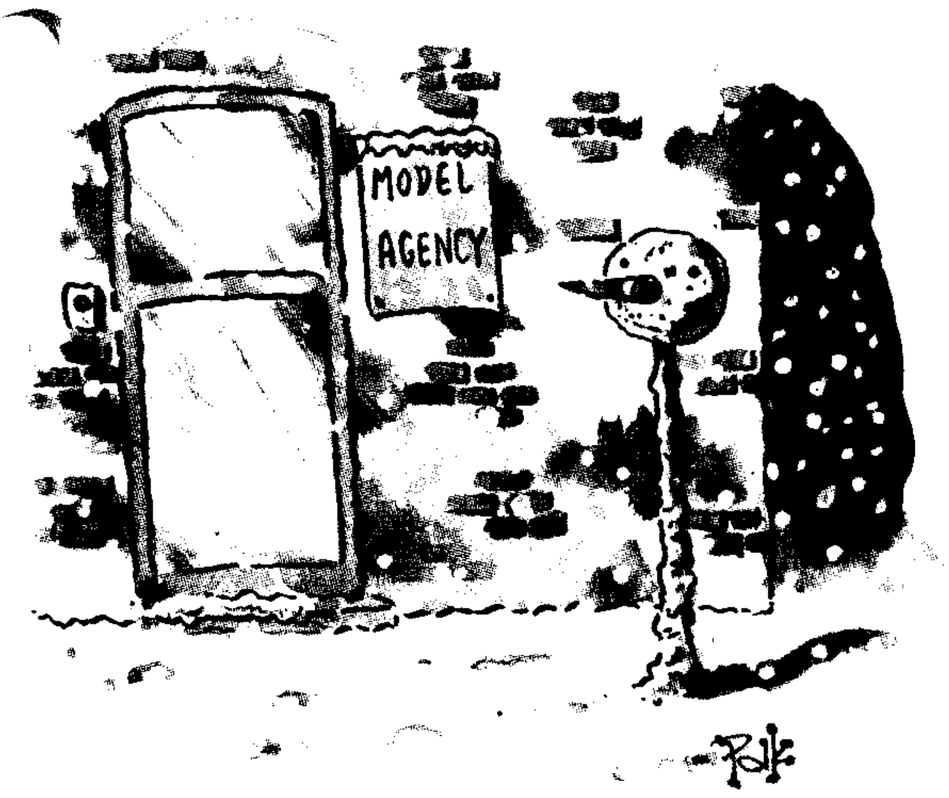
But he needed even more money to pay for his extravagant life,
Not to mention the shopping habits of his extravagant wife.
And so Lord Black became more and more rash
As he helped himself to his shareholders' cash.

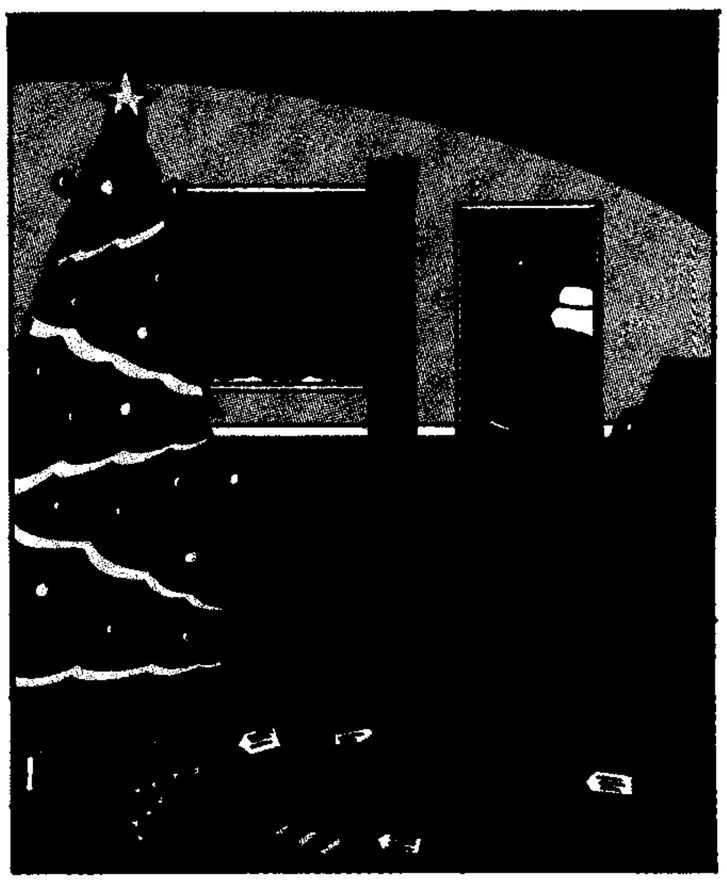
To pay for the furs and the shoes and the Bollinger
He stole from the unsuspecting shareholders of Hollinger.
Until one day these honest US investors began to complain
Saying, "Goddammit, it's us that's paying for that guy's champagne!"

But Lord Black looked down his nose at them with an arrogant sneer,
Saying "You can't touch me, I'm a British peer."
Alas, for Lord Black, in his argument there was a flaw
And soon the Chicago cops came knocking at his door.

"We've come to give you your comeuppance.
For what you have stolen is considerably more than tuppence."
And so to cut a long and sorry story short
That's how Conrad ended up in court.

Right to the end, however, he insisted he had done no wrong,
Which is why his prison sentence turned out to be so long.
And despite the entreaties of Lord Rees-Mogg and Sir Elton John
Behind bars this arrogant fat crook has finally gone.





"Sorry, son, we only have limited powers of wish-granting"

"As most of our toys are made in China, we thought, why not..."""

ARISTIDE BRUANT DOES PANTO

FESTIVE CHEER WITH TERENCE AND SHIRLEY CONRAN

Christmas-talking so much more relaxing for everyone involved. My secretary then types out the minutes on Boxing Day and we circulate them for everybody to enjoy by New Year's Eve.

Shirley: Never never EVER let your guests talk about themselves. It's so BORING. The last thing I want to do on Christmas Day is leave the table upset that no one has talked about me.

Shirley: Here's a handy tip for anyone sick to death of Christmas cards. Chuck them all unopened into the bin and then have your darling Filipino maid set fire to it. Flamethrowers are surprisingly inexpensive. I have a particular loathing for Christmas cards with scenes depicting Mary and Joseph and little whatsisname plus all the mangy old cattle and assorted johnny-come-latelys in those hellish surroundings. What sort of Christmas did that turn out to be? No wonder that kid had issues.

Terence: A crib for a bed? Not when there are so many more stylish and relaxing options. For a child of that age, I'd go for something simple, like a whitewashed Swedish pine bed with a removable four-poster frame and washable canopy. And though I'm a tremendous admirer of our hard-working agricultural community, I'd put an absolute ban on entertaining shepherds and related farmworkers at this time of year. Lambs, maybe – but only if pre-slaughtered. Frankly, shepherds tend to be very grubby, bringing soil and what-not into the house, and Christmas is a time of clean lines and dazzling white surfaces; frankly, you don't want the place ending up as a tip. On the other hand, one might well find a place around one's festive table for three kings. Christmas is a time for royalty. In the past, one has entertained Charles and Camilla, and one has found them both to be HUGELY convivial.

Shirley: You don't want to be doing with Christmas stockings. I've never understood why parents go to all that trouble. They must be mad! Young children should be perfectly satisfied with a book, and there's no need to wrap it. This year I'm giving all my grandchildren copies of my new book, *Managing Your Work-Life Balance*. And Christmas trees are a dreadful nuisance too. Whenever I visit a friend's house and find that they have a Christmas tree clogging up the sitting room, I take out my axe – I bought it from this marvellous little shop in the Dordogne ten years ago – and chop it down.

Terence: I used to do the whole business, dressing up as Father Christmas and so forth. Needless to say, I'd never consent to wearing that dreadful beard – there's nothing less civilised than a snowy white beard. And scarlet has never been one of one's favourite colours, so I refused to wear that ghastly uniform of his, preferring a lightweight cotton suit from New York with a delightful blouson hand-stitched by one of my favourite tailors in Perugia. Despite my efforts, I'm afraid our children soon twigged that it was *moi*, but then they've always been fearfully bright.

Terence: Instead of crackers, we always lay out exquisite little luxury trinkets from one of our favourite stores in Seville on a black matt tray and pass them around, maximum two per person. It saves all that tiresome pulling. Of course, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without paper hats. I design ours in June; we have them hand-made from the finest vellum at the workshops of the hugely wonderful Fabio Montrale of Umbria. It's all HUGELY civilised.

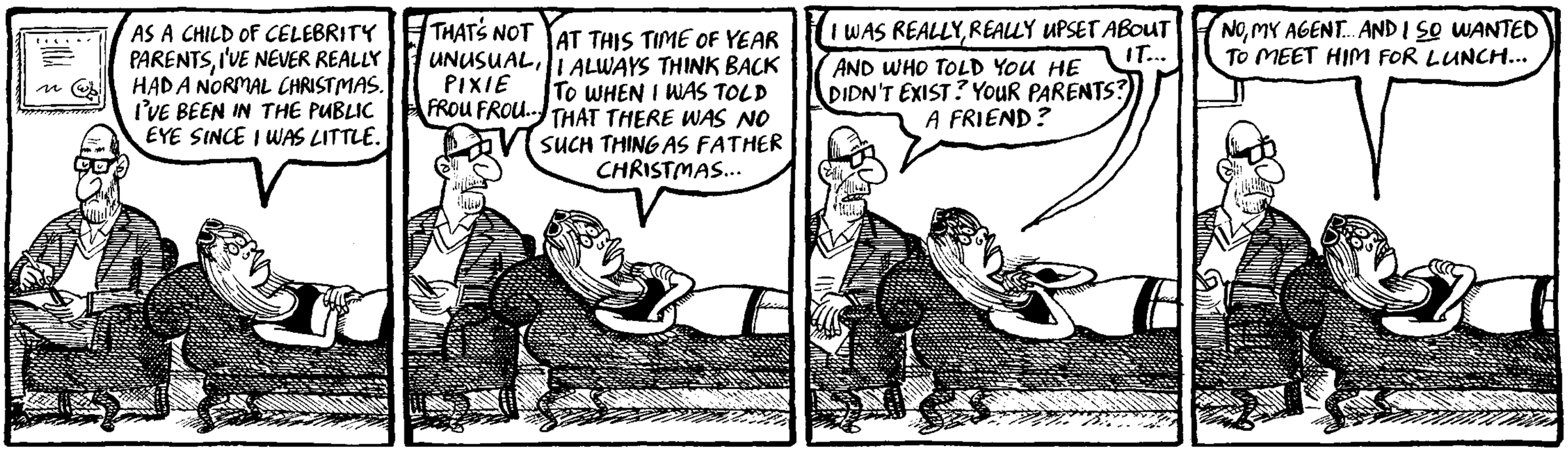
Shirley: Never EVER open your door to a carol-singer. Tell them that if they really MUST, they should jolly well record their wretched carols and post them to you, ready for binning. Turkeys are another no-no for Christmas. Frankly, why bother? Nevertheless it's VITAL to plan ahead: the night before Christmas, uncork two or three bottles of halfway-decent burgundy, then drink them over breakfast and – hey presto! – by Christmas you'll have forgotten all about eating. Keep it simple! Cheers!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Terence: Civilised conversation has always been desperately, desperately important to me, never more so than on Christmas Day. One simply can't afford to leave it to chance. So once the designer bell has sounded for luncheon and everyone has foregathered around our festive Conran-designed table, shaped from a unique and to my mind tremendously beautiful combination of elm and ground elder, I always insist that the conversation begins forthwith. It's probably a tremendous failing of mine – incidentally, do remind me tell you about my failings, you'll be frightfully impressed – but I'm not one of those people who can stomach aimless chit-chat about this-and-that. So it's all eminently civilised, with a beautiful hand-printed Conran-designed "conversation-sheet" for each member of the family and allotted guest, detailing the topic of conversation, and suggested opinions, for each of our six courses. I always have a decent book of famous quotations to hand, one for each diner. It's the only way to keep it interesting. And we always conclude each conversation with a deliciously light-hearted yet comprehensive summing-up from myself. It's a splendidly enjoyable procedure, and makes the whole business of

Shirley: Never EVER cook a chipolata. Too much effort! At this time of year, there's a tremendous amount of drivel talked about frying or grilling your chipolatas. But there's absolutely NO NEED. Save yourself time by following my advice. When I was married to Terence, we'd always serve chipolatas raw in a salad with chicory and endives. To cheer them up a bit, you can always sculpt them into lovely flower shapes – minced pork lends itself wonderfully to azalias and primroses. Chipolata daffodils as a salad centrepiece can lend a wonderfully hopeful note of spring cheer to a cold December.

Terence: I always treat myself to a splendid shopping expedition to the delightful market places of the Auvergne in late August/early September. It's the only way to find exactly the right chipolatas for Christmas. Let's face it, chipolatas can be fearfully boring simply served up on a plate. Some years, we bind them together with splendid Christmas ribbons in wonderfully rich reds and greens and hang them over the 18th century mirror above the drawing room mantelpiece. Other years, we find they make a very effective Christmas tree decoration, every branch hanging with three or four shiny little chipolatas. Magic!


AS A CHILD OF CELEBRITY PARENTS, I'VE NEVER REALLY HAD A NORMAL CHRISTMAS. I'VE BEEN IN THE PUBLIC EYE SINCE I WAS LITTLE.
THAT'S NOT UNUSUAL, PIXIE FROU FROU...
AT THIS TIME OF YEAR I ALWAYS THINK BACK TO WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS FATHER CHRISTMAS...
I WAS REALLY, REALLY UPSET ABOUT IT...
AND WHO TOLD YOU HE DIDN'T EXIST? YOUR PARENTS? A FRIEND?
NO, MY AGENT... AND I SO WANTED TO MEET HIM FOR LUNCH...

Literary Review

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Finger-wagging time

READERS of the annual *Times Literary Supplement* Books of the Year feature will have enjoyed a spectacle that comes round to divert them as regularly as the festive turkey: the sight of Mr Craig Raine ranting.

A couple of years back our man devoted most of his space to chewing up the critics who hadn't sufficiently appreciated the work of his darling chum Ian McEwan. This time the target was "the British satirical magazine *Private Eye*" which each year "publishes a page of sanctimonious tut-tutting over collective nepotism in Books of the Year".

Righteously enraged by the thought of his disinterested critical judgement being called into question, Mr R consequently garnished each of his selections with the most wounding ironical sign-offs ("I am thanked in the acknowledgements..."; "My wife is thanked in the acknowledgements..."; "Yes I'm there in the acknowledgments...") before wittily concluding: "What a year for my friends (and the finger to the finger-waggers of *Private Eye*.") Well, good for Mr Raine! This feature usually starts with a paragraph or two setting out the reasons for its existence. This year, happily, someone else – unpaid as well! – has done the job for us.

Log Roller of the Year

Winner: **Craig Raine** (*TLS*), helpfully pointing out that six of his pluggees were chums, another was someone he'd like to be a chum, and only one was a complete stranger.

Runner-up: **Lloyd Evans** (*Spectator*): "The funniest new book I read all year was *Cooler, Faster, More Expensive – The Return of the Sloane Ranger* by Peter York and a friend of mine, Olivia Stewart-Liberty. Olivia is my son's godmother."

Highly commended: **D.J. Taylor** for plugging his friend David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain* in the *TLS* along with his Norfolk neighbour Anthony Thwaite's *Collected Poems*, and his friend Paul Willetts' *North Soho 999* in the *Spectator*.

Best gay log-rolling

Winners: **Jackie Kay** in the *Observer* ("Ali Smith's fabulous retelling of the story of Iphis in *Girl Meets Boy* – the best sex I've read in years") and **Ali Smith** in the *Guardian* ("this year I'd give people Jackie Kay's new selected poems... proof of her place as one of the most deft, most airy, most unencumbered, most fearless and most humane of poets")

Judges' note: Happily Jeanette Winterson's discovery of Smith, enthusiastically conveyed to readers of the Summer Reading supplement, had its answering call. According to Smith, writing in the *TLS*, Winterson is a novelist "whose originality will always be her hallmark" and *The Stone Gods* "a blend of wit, yearning and grief whose rolling, open structure argues optimism in the face of grave loss."

Best Irish log-rolling

Winner: **Paul Muldoon** (*TLS*) "Ciaran Carson's *The Tain*... Clair Wills' wonderful study, *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland during the Second World War... Luck and the Irish, a brief history of change 1970-2000* by Roy Foster, proves that being a great stylist doesn't mean there's any diminution of substance."

Runners-up: **Roy Foster** (*TLS*) puffing Wills and Paul Bew; **Colm Toibin** (*Guardian*) on Foster and Paul Durcan.

Highly commended: **Seamus Heaney** (*TLS*) praising Carson.

Best Scottish log-rolling

Joint winners: In the Glasgow *Herald* no fewer than six authors – **Alexander McCall Smith, Tom Devine, Sally Magnusson, Sheena McDonald, Neville Moir** and **Ruaridh Nicoll** – choose as their Scottish book of the year *Scotland: The Autobiography*, an anthology edited by Rosemary Goring. The *Herald*'s literary editor, in charge of the very pages in which these encomia appeared, is none other than Rosemary Goring.

Best Asian log-rolling

Winners: **Monica Ali** (*Guardian*) "Look out for Hanif Kureishi's *Something to Tell You*, which I read far too late into last night"; and **Hari Kunzru** (*Guardian*) "I'm impatient to read Hanif Kureishi's forthcoming novel... Rumour has it, it's very good."

Best plug for own signing

Winner: **John Kampfner** (*Observer*): "*The Icarus Girl* by Helen Oyeyemi... Oyeyemi is one of the UK's most important young literary talents" – and a contributing editor of Kampfner's *New Statesman*.

Best plug for own author

Winner: **Jamie Byng**, Canongate publisher, Sunday Herald: "Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* (Canongate) will make you weep with joy."

Best plug for Thames valley neighbour

Winner: **John Mortimer** (*Observer*): "Robert Harris's *The Ghost* is a memorable commentary on the essential vanity of politicians."

Most blatant plug for own agent

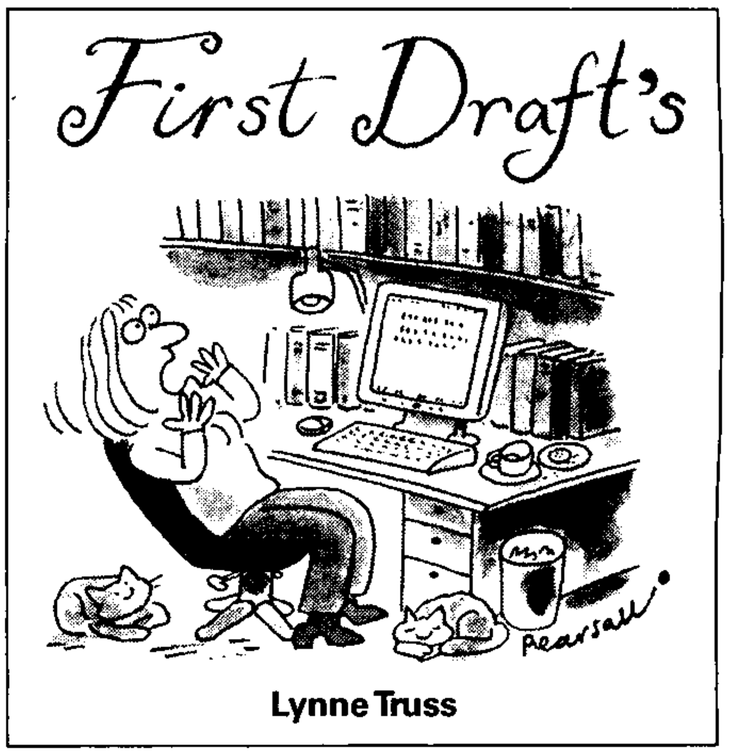
Winner: **Jane Ridley** (*Spectator*): "*An Alphabet of Aunts* by CM Dawnay is the perfect solution to everyone's Christmas present problem." And as Caroline Dawnay the pluggee represents the plugger at PFD.

Frankest confession

Winner: **John Bayley** (*TLS*): "I have read hardly anything this year except Barbara Pym, an excellent true-life spy thriller by Ben Macintyre, *Agent Zigzag*, and an absorbing study of Kierkegaard."

Longest thank-you letter

Winner: **Roger Lewis** (*Spectator*) who devoted half of a lengthy response to praising Jonathan Black's *The Secret History of the World* ("no newspaper would permit me to review it"). Jonathan Black is a pseudonym for the publisher Mark Booth, who runs Century, Lewis noted, omitting to mention that Century published his Peter Sellers biography.



Most eager to plug own publisher

Joint winners: **William Trevor** in the *Spectator* (both choices from Penguin); and **Stefan Collini** in the *TLS* (both choices from OUP).

Runners-up: Pundits quietly saluting work issued by their own publishers included **Anne Enright** on Tessa Hadley, bright stars both on the list of Jonathan Cape; **Ian Rankin** on James Lee Burke, each sponsored by the kind people at Orion; and **Philip Hensher** on Michael Chabon, two ornaments of the Fourth Estate catalogue.

Highly commended: Faber poets rooting for the *Letters of Ted Hughes*, published by Faber and edited by Faber poetry supremo Christopher Reid, included **Seamus Heaney** (TLS) and **Tom Paulin** (*New Statesman*). Nicci Gerrard could be found in the *Observer* enthusing over a collection of photographs by the "unique and inimitable" Jane Bown, of the *Observer*, issued by Guardian Books, the publishing arm of the Guardian Media Group, owners of... the *Observer*.

Most obscure recommendation

Winner: **Jan Morris** (*Observer*): "Unexpectedly pre-eminent among my books of 2007 was Richard Bebb's sumptuously learned *Welsh Furniture 1250-1950* (Saer Books)."

Runner-up: Anita Brookner (*Spectator*): "The novels of Edith de Born, completely forgotten precursor to Sybille Bedford... These novels are long out of print and perhaps need not be revived. Their saving grace is that... this author writes like a lady."

Unobtainable by ordinary punters prize

For some reason *Guardian* contributors displayed the most annoying habit of Books of the Year pundits – recommending stuff which isn't actually published yet. Highlights included **Andrew Motion** plumping for Benjamin Markovitz's *A Quiet Adjustment* (due in January); **William Boyd** selecting James Meek's *We Are Now Beginning Our Descent* (February); **Jonathan Coe** on Rodge Glass's authorised biography of Alasdair Gray (next autumn) and, worst of all, **Anne Enright** on a new Alice Munro manuscript of which there are, as yet, only "rumours".

Taking his cue, *Roger Lewis* (*Spectator*) enthused over Duncan Fallowell's "long-awaited hedonistic masterpiece about his visit to New Zealand, *Going as Far as I Can*", which the catalogues have down for early 2008.

Clive James memorial award for biggest show-off

Winner: The ever-reliable *Frederic Raphael* (*TLS*): "Claude Lefort's *Le Temps Present*... a fat, never obese, collection of articles from a lifetime of political engagement"; Mimmo Franzinelli's *L'amnistia Togliatti*... "an enlightening instance of *multum in parvo*"; and Daniel Mundo's *Pasatiempos*, "a slim volume of essays on politics in yesterday's Argentina which, under the urbane new façade, is also today's"; and his compatriot Jose Pablo Feinmann's novel, *La sombra de Heidegger*."

Most confusing performance by a Booker judge

Winner: **Ruth Scurr** (*Daily Telegraph*) who declared that Anne Enright's *The Gathering* "won the prize and deserved it" but undercut this by picking Nicola Barker's *Darkmans* as her book of the year elsewhere and calling it "the novel of the decade". Equally mystifyingly she praised a further seven titles, including works by Michael Ondaatje and Al Kennedy, as apparently part of a list of "novels that did not make the shortlist [but] ought to have done".

Handiest Christmas present idea

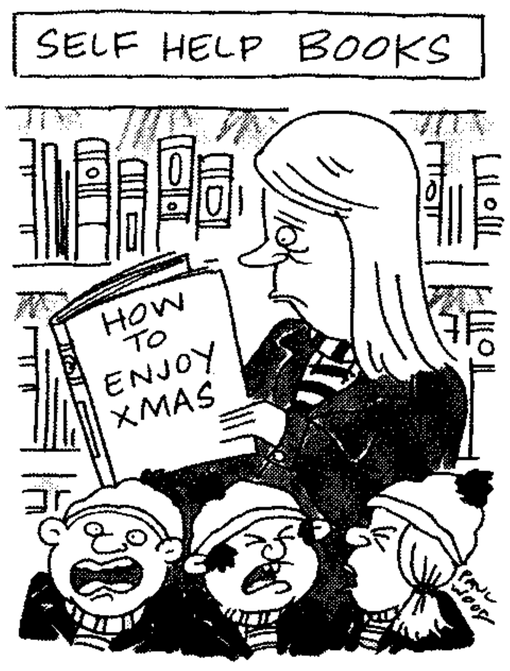
Winner: **Jonathan Sumption** (*Spectator*): "The second volume of FP Locke's *Edmund Burke* (Clarendon Press, £190 for both volumes)". *Runner-up*: **James Davidson** (*TLS*): "Henry Immerwahr's *Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions*".

Special Non-Log Roller of the Year Award

Winner: **Anita Brookner** (*Spectator*): "Death of the novel – again. This conclusion was reached after reading the ramshackle performances of JM Coetzee, Michael Ondaatje and Philip Roth."

Private Eye's Worstseller Chart - Christmas Turkeys

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Sales to date
1	Boris Johnson	*Perils of the Pushy Parents*	HarperPress	1,576
2	Russell Brand	*Irons in the Fire*	Hodder & Stoughton	2,449
3	Harry Hill	*Further Adventures of the Queen Mum*	Faber	2,662
4	Louis Walsh	*Fast Track to Fame*	Transworld	2,864
5	Jordan Paramor	*X Factor: Access All Areas*	Headline	3,601



JUST FANCY THAT

■ OH DEAR. Legal publisher Sweet & Maxwell has had problems paying freelancers since outsourcing its accounts payable functions to India.

Impatient unpaid writers were sent placatory emails last month apologising for the "teething problems" and promising that paying them is, er, "absolutely a key driver".

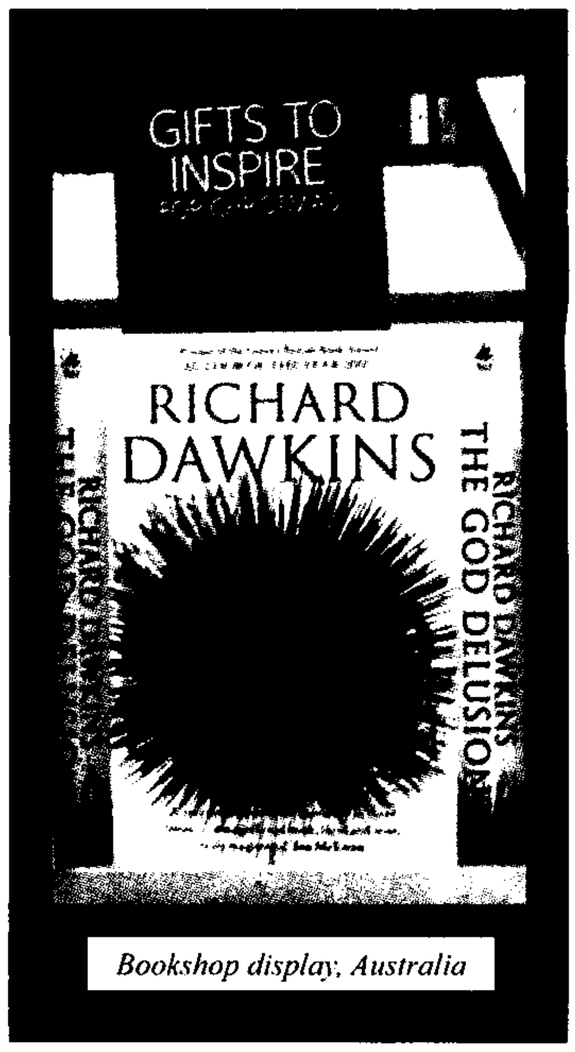
Sweet & Maxwell of course publishes the outsourcing industry bible, *the Outsourcing Practice Manual*. If it can't get it right, can anyone?

BRITISH COUNCIL

■ HARD on the heels of its move into reality TV shows in Ghana (*Eye 1196*), the British Council is to scrap 20 of its small remaining staff in Nigeria.

Several British Council offices were closed down in the country in the last "restructuring" just two years ago, leaving 37 staff spread across four centres in Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt and Abuja. All 37 have been given the choice of voluntary retirement or re-applying for the 17 remaining jobs.

According to Lagos newspaper *This Day*, British Council bosses described the severance packages as generous; but it also reported that there are concerns in Nigeria that the centres are being "turned into business centres, instead of centres for research and cultural exchange". Indeed, the new Knowledge and Learning Centre in Lagos boasts "a core collection of top-level management books".

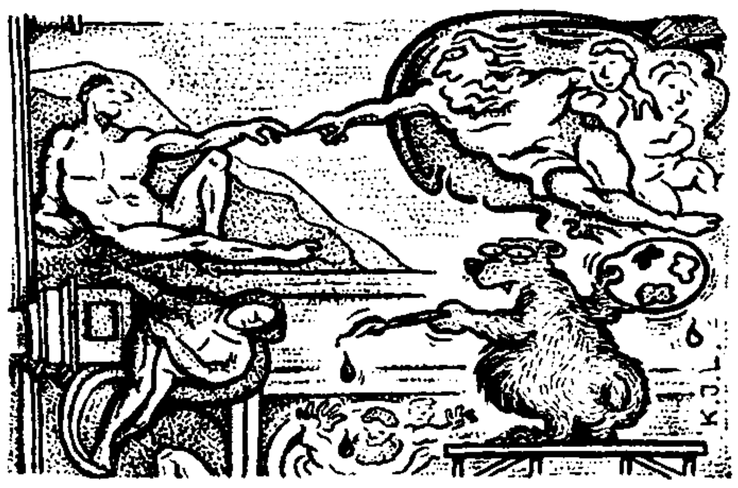


Bookshop display, Australia

LUVVIES

Vanessa, who recently appeared in the film Atonement, believes it is a misconception to see them [the Redgrave family] as an intense, brooding clan of serious luvvies. She explains: "I mean from my point of view I always think how nice it must be to know us! Because we're fun".

VANESSA REDGRAVE, *Evening Standard*
Submitted by Margaret Love.



[Mark] Wallinger received the £25,000 cheque last night after being nominated for another work, State Britain, a meticulous re-creation of Brian Haw's anti-war protest in Parliament Square. The Tate said that there were parallels between Wallinger and the Berlin Gallery, and Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel: 'Both artists were interested in transforming spaces.'

***The Times* on the Turner Prize**

In art history terms, we are at the dawn of the Renaissance after the Dark Ages. Just as the Renaissance broke down the distinctions between sacred and profane art forms and between individual and community, so we are seeing a similar exciting blurring today...

MAURICE LEVY, Chairman of the Publicis Group, on the future of advertising, *Guardian*

Pseuds Corner

She agrees that dispensing with some of the glitz may allow more cerebral qualities to shine through, particularly in her role as a chair of Truce, an organisation that aims to promote tolerance through football by bringing together young players in world trouble spots.

'In the New Year I'm going to be travelling a lot in Europe and the Middle East. I can see a picture of me in a battlefield somewhere with short hair and I think it will look better. I don't know whether people will take me more seriously. Maybe. It's quite peculiar if you need to have short hair to show your intelligence. I've always wanted to be attractive and look sexy but at the same time to show I have substance and be taken seriously as an intelligent person.

NANCY DELL'OLIO on 'Life after Sven', *Daily Mail*

My work really begins around midnight, when I go to sleep. Shamans are aware that life is brief, and the night is precious. My main area is human-animal relationships, and I do a lot of my work in the dream state, so I make sure my environment is conducive to dreaming...I get up around 5 am. Dusk and dawn, when the veil is very thin, are fantastic times for shamanic work. My day begins with a practice from the Path of Pollen – an ancient tradition of bee shamanism. For about three-quarters of an hour I do the lemniscatic walk; it looks like walking in a figure of eight...[continues]

'A Life in the Day' of Sacred Trust director NAOMI LEWIS, *Sunday Times*

Glen Matlock and Paul Jones form a tight rhythm section, while Rotten does what he does best: strutting like a marionette plugged into the mains, arms aloft, the eyes of childhood meningitis staring frostily into the crowd he both loves and disdains. Olivier's Richard III ('deformed, unfinished'), Arthur Askey, the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Ken Dodd: they are all there.

MATTHEW D'ANCONA watches the Sex Pistols, *Spectator*

Pseuds Corporate

The concept will be chameleon urban chic. Daytime trade will be focused on relaxed grazing in our well designed and comfortable bar, in the evening we raise the tempo to become the place to meet in Keighley and a feeder bar for what will be our newly refurbished nightclub, just 100 metres away.

Advertisement for bar manager's job at the Lord Rodney, Keighley

CONTRIBUTORS: Anon, Ben Black, Valerie Dabbs, Karen Robson, K.G. Banks, Martin Firth.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

JUNKETING

Bourn to self-serve

WHO exactly did Sir John Bourn, the Auditor General, schmooze over all those delightful dinners at taxpayers' expense?

The National Audit Commission's free-spending boss may be on his way out, but his last session with the public accounts commission provided no answers. Nauseatingly, normally terrier-like MPs seemed happy to fawn over Sir John and let him off the hook over his organisation's failings. He was even allowed to get away with pretending to welcome greater transparency over his junketing, even though the *Eye* had to drag the details out of the NAO and still can't find out precisely whom he dined and wined so expensively.

● WE MAY not know who Sir John took out to dinner, but at least we have a long list of those whose largesse he enjoyed. It includes the Ministry of Defence, apparently the host of a plush reception at the RAC club last summer.

This sounded an odd use of taxpayers' money, so the *Eye* contacted the MoD. It turns out Sir John's list was wrong. The soirée was in fact hosted by "a number of defence companies" as a thank-you to the outgoing head of the MoD's Defence Export Services Organisation, Alan Garwood – who, of course, did so much for their businesses.

The firms weren't going to pass up a chance to schmooze not only Sir John, who judges whether their work gives value for money, but also those who sign their multi-billion contracts – including Defence Secretary Des Browne, the then procurement minister Lord Drayson and "a number of officials".

The *Eye* has since obtained a copy of the MoD's policy on accepting hospitality. Lunches and dinners may be accepted by mandarins "as long as acceptance is considered to be necessary in the interests of the department", but "invitations of a purely social kind... from private companies, defence contractors or other organisations with whom the department has, or potentially has, official business should be declined".

Though MoD officials appear to be breaking these rules under the noses of their ministerial masters, a spokesman said: "We do not hold a record of the defence companies which funded the event. Neither do we hold information about which officials were invited because invitations were sent by the hosts to guests."

● ALSO on Sir John's list was EDS, the government's atrocious IT supplier.

Accounts just filed at Companies House show that in 2006, UK chief executive Bill Thomas received a 58 percent pay rise, trousering more than £1m. Internal figures seen by the *Eye* show that the Texas-based firm's UK operations, 85 percent of which involve extracting cash from British taxpayers, generated all the company's worldwide profits of around $800m.

Small wonder EDS could afford to take Sir John for an expensive meal (shortly before he was due to report on its disastrous handiwork at the Child Support Agency – see *Eye* 1198). What EDS can't afford, however, is to pay for mistakes. Two years after agreeing to compensate the taxpayer for its role in screwing up the introduction of tax credits, the firm still owes £27m. HMRC has been forced to scuttle back to the lawyers to get hold of the cash.

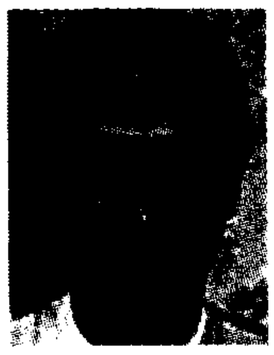
EDS's current deals meanwhile are going much the way of its old ones. Its Department of Work and Pensions contract has already cost £85m more than expected in 2006/07 "to meet higher demands". A contract to merge the MoD's personnel administration is plagued with errors, and a £4bn contract to upgrade military IT had reached 224 MoD sites in April against a planned 680.

THE KILLING OF MARGARET WILSON

A conviction lacking in fibre

MARGARET WILSON, a 66-year-old grandmother, was brutally murdered on a quiet country road in Yorkshire in February 1995, victim of an apparently motiveless and random attack. Two farm workers saw a man pursue Mrs Wilson, then disappear with her behind a hedge for an instant before making his getaway in an estate car. By the time they reached her, it was too late: her throat had been slit twice.

Two-and-a-half years later Derek Christian (pictured), a former Royal Engineer and father-of-three, was convicted of Mrs Wilson's murder and sentenced to life, with a recommendation he serve at least 17 years. The prosecution case was that Christian, then aged 33, left his job as a factory hand at McCain's chip factory in Scarborough at 3pm, detoured to the village of Burton Fleming, slaughtered Mrs Wilson and then went to his local cash-point machine in Driffield, some 20 miles away. There, at 4.06pm, he withdrew cash for a planned shopping trip with his wife.



With a normal 35-minute drive home, the case was that he had some 30 minutes to cruise around looking for a random victim, pursue and kill her, wash off any incriminating blood or dirt, and then head for his bank. With no motive, the prosecution claimed that only Christian would know why he carried out such a senseless, grotesque crime.

"Ex-soldier murdered on a whim: How science cracked the case", was the headline following Christian's conviction at Leeds crown court in December 1997. For the only evidence directly linking him to the killing were 78 fibres found on Mrs Wilson's clothing and said to be "microscopically indistinguishable" from clothes Christian wore to work.

But as *Eye* readers are aware from a litany of judicial miscarriages, "science" can get things horribly wrong. Now new evidence has emerged that throws serious doubt on the fibre evidence in a case whose other aspects were already weak.

Christian came to police attention three days after the murder as part of a trawl of the owners of Ford Montego estate cars similar to that seen by eye-witnesses, including the two farm workers. It seems Christian was originally eliminated from inquiries because his car was silver and most witnesses described a white vehicle; a forensic examination of his car revealed no blood traces or anything to link him to the crime; and he had a goatee beard, when witnesses described the assailant as clean shaven.

Over a year later, however, an expert analysis of the murder weapon – a sharp bloodstained knife manufactured by J. Adams found at the scene – claimed the staining on it could have come from cutting potatoes. The knives were widely used in fisheries, fish and chip shops, and factories – including the McCain's factory where Christian worked. He was suddenly back in the frame, even though there was nothing to directly link the knife to him or his workplace. The knife carried no fingerprints and two starch grains on it could have come from gloves worn by the experts who examined it.

A forensic examination of his car again found nothing to link him to the crime. There was no match for the two distinct footprints at the murder scene. There was no check to see if his tyres matched tracks found on the road near where the assailant's car had been seen. This time, however, police removed some of his clothing for examination. Christian actually called police back to tell them they had taken the "wrong" work trousers and gave them another pair thinking tests would clear him. But fibres from those jogging trousers, fleece jacket and sweatshirt were all said to have been found on Mrs Wilson's clothing.

Christian still hoped eyewitness evidence would clear him. But two witnesses who saw the assailant in his car before the murder, and who helped compile photo-fit pictures of him, were never asked to make a formal identification.

Two other women had reported to police being followed by a sinister looking man in a white estate car (one two days before the murder and one on the morning of the murder) at times when Christian was at work. Both incidents were some ten miles away. And a third witness actually claimed to have seen a man driving round Burton Fleming itself in a similar white car some three hours before the murder, again when Christian was at work. Bizarrely, after giving evidence she contacted the court to say she had made the entire story up.

His defence was hampered, however, by the fact that he had changed his account of his movements on the day of the murder. Initially he said he had gone straight home to meet his children from school as usual. But after talking to his parents-in-law, they both claimed he had been helping them move furniture and thus had an alibi. In fact that turned out to have been the following day – an easy mistake to make a year after the event – but it was portrayed as a sinister "lie".

At the end of the trial the prosecution summed up the complicated fibre evidence, saying the mix of fibres from all three of Christian's garments amounted to "proof positive". In fact expert analysis had found no unique identifying fibres and one item of clothing, bought separately for "elimination" purposes, held no fewer than three of the seven kinds of fibres said to link Christian to the crime. So rather than being "microscopically indistinguishable" they were actually commonplace.

Now, however, new material has cast further doubt on the fibre evidence and the Criminal Cases Review Commission is re-examining the Christian case. It has emerged that when Christian's clothes were taken for examination, on the same day Mrs Wilson' coat was examined again and a "pill" or tuft of matted material was extracted from it. This contained nine of the supposedly "incriminating" fibres and two of the seven identified types. Such tufts only appear on clothing after prolonged wear, so the fibres found in them are likely to have been there a long time and not deposited by recent contact. The "pill" thus points to Christian's innocence rather than his guilt. In addition, other fibres could have come from Mrs Wilson's daughter-in-law's clothing, which was also tested; a policeman's polo shirt shed the same fibre. The fleece and jogging pants Christian wore are sold everywhere.

Christian's family hope the new evidence, coupled with the fact that Christian has no mental disorder or illness that could explain him suddenly turning into a psychopathic killer, will finally clear his name. For while he has been in jail, in Devon and Cornwall another woman and teenager out walking in the country have both had their throats slashed in equally motiveless murders. No one has ever been caught for those crimes.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£25bn Amount lent by taxpayers to Northern Rock with no promise of repayment

£15bn Amount government claimed it would cost to compensate victims of collapsed pensions schemes when rejecting ombudsman's findings 18 months ago – "a precedent of extraordinary financial proportions" according to Tony Blair.

£3bn Amount the government now puts on compensation, to be paid over several decades, after reluctantly agreeing to do the decent thing.

PFI SPECIAL

1. BARTS HOSPITAL

Wipe the flaw

CALCULATIONS justifying the most expensive PFI hospital scheme in the country – at St Bartholomew & the Royal London – are fundamentally flawed, the *Eye* can reveal. As a result the hospital will cost the local NHS hundreds of millions more than it should have had to pay.

The "full business case" for the 43-year PFI scheme, given an official capital value of £1.1bn, puts the total "present cost" at £7.8bn, compared to the £8.1bn it would have cost if publicly funded. So the PFI approach looks cheaper – until the fiddling of the calculations is understood.

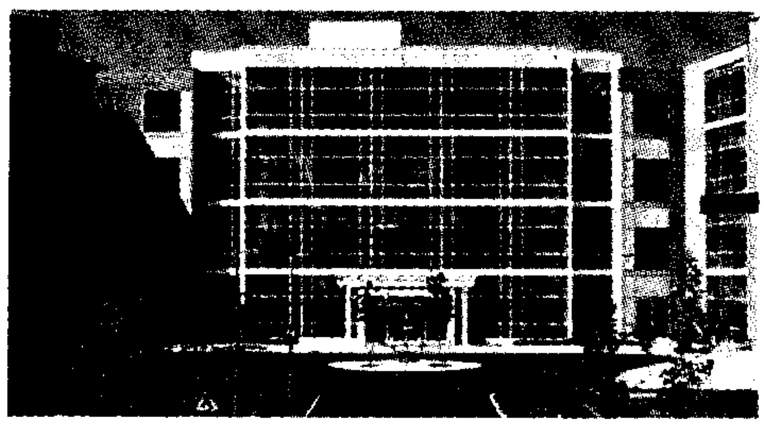
Buried away in the 370-page "full business case" is the revelation that in comparing the PFI and publicly funded alternatives, future payments are discounted not only to remove the effects of inflation but by a further 6 percent per annum (compounded). As PFI deals stretch out payments over a long period, the higher the discount factor used, the more PFI looks better value.

In 2003 even the Treasury realised that 6 percent was a ridiculously high discount figure and dropped it to 3.5 percent (which is still excessive). So why was 6 percent used in the Barts deal, which wasn't signed until 2006?

The answer reveals the lengths to which the Treasury will go to force PFI on to over-stretched NHS budgets. Although 6 percent was known to be way out of line, Barts used it on the (economically irrelevant) grounds that "the Invitation to Negotiate for this project was issued prior to April 2003".

In a commendable show of openness Barts handed over to the *Eye* several reams of data showing the assumptions and payment profiles behind the calculations that said PFI would be cheaper. Independent economists who spent weeks crunching the numbers for the *Eye* then worked out that if a 3.5 percent discount factor had been used (and even this is excessive) the PFI option would have been more than £100m more expensive than the public sector alternative.

It's no great surprise that sensible economic analysis shows PFI to cost well over the odds, though this is the first time an authority has given full access to its figures to prove it. But then Barts never was too happy being lumbered with PFI. Two years ago its then chairman Dr John Ashworth gave his view on Gordon Brown's preferred method of building hospitals: "The Treasury ought to call PFI back, but that would put it back on the balance sheet. If this was the private sector you'd be in jail. This is what got Enron into trouble – it's all off the balance sheet. It's cloud cuckoo land, Alice in Wonderland stuff."



2. NORFOLK & NORWICH

No room at the in-patients

THE private finance initiative is posing a serious threat to the government's plans for independent foundation trust hospitals as those burdened with PFI can't operate without central government support.

The Norfolk and Norwich, a £160m PFI hospital opened in 2001, finds its foundation trust application stuck in the Department of Health two months after it should have been forwarded to Monitor, the foundation trust regulator. The hospital's PFI scheme sets it back £44m a year (and rising), demanding a central government "smoothing payment", aka subsidy, of around £4m a year. But even this isn't enough.

To head off an anticipated £15m deficit in 2005/06 the hospital had to cut 450 jobs. It remains to be seen whether even these measures will put the hospital on a permanently even keel.

Meanwhile, fresh crises grip the trust. A "black alert" was recently declared as patients were turned away when the hospital ran out of beds. Such emergencies are increasingly common since the number of beds in the trust fell drastically following the PFI scheme, forcing occupancy levels up 9 percent and above officially recommended levels – figures which emerged in the National Audit Office's buried report on PFI hospitals that *Eye* 1187 exposed.

3. THE ADVISERS

Fee for all

LAST month parliament's public accounts committee produced another litany of failings in PFI.

To start with, it takes nearly three years on average to sign deals under hopelessly complex contracts to package up building and services. Reviews of services during the contracts then push prices up 14 percent as PFI companies and their experienced advisers run rings round public officials who typically do one deal in their careers.

The advisers, it emerged, earn an average £3m from the taxpayer per project. As more than 800 have been signed so far, that's getting on for £2.5bn – before the even larger fees for advising the PFI companies (who then recoup them through charges under the PFI deal). Total fees to PFI lawyers and consultants so far are probably heading for the £10bn mark.

As the gravy train steams on, Gordon Brown, the driving force behind PFI, can at last be forced to answer questions on it – unlike when he was chancellor and palmed them off on to his juniors. Challenged at prime minister's questions last month by Labour MP David Taylor on the wisdom of forcing through a massive schools building programme using PFI, Gordon insisted: "It simply would not have been possible... without using the PFI model." In fact it would have been possible without PFI if he had been prepared to put the debts on the books. Fiddling the figures came before services, however – to much cheer from the nation's lawyers, bankers and consultants.

4. THE SPIN

Hutton dressed as sham

BUSINESS Secretary John Hutton's announcement this month of a review of Labour's PFI and privatisation programmes inadvertently showed whom these programmes are really for. And it's not taxpayers.

Hutton announced his review with the claim that "transforming public services is a new growth industry", enthusing that privatisation "has made a tremendous contribution to UK Plc" and that "thousands of organisations have prospered in this new industry, employing tens, possibly hundreds of thousands, of people."

These employees are unlikely to be very grateful to the new firms for their jobs, as they previously held much the same roles working for the public sector. But the "prospering" businesses have every reason to welcome their PFI profits as Hutton's review shows that cabinet ministers seem to think the public sector is there to boost private companies. Hutton noted that the government "procured £115bn worth of goods" but seemed more concerned with using the cash to boost industry rather than getting value for money, creating "a sector with huge potential" for profits.

Hutton put a little-known BP director, DeAnne Julius, in charge of the review. And who is she exactly? None other than a former board member of leading PFI and privatisation firm Serco and of Lloyds TSB, a big PFI investor. No prizes for guessing which way Hutton's impartial review is going to swing...

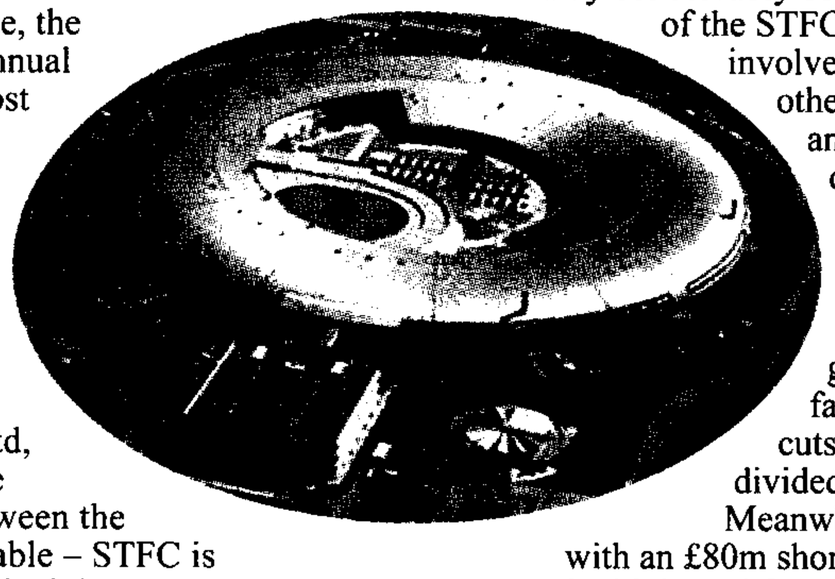
BIG SCIENCE

Diamond geezers

DARK days loom for British astronomers and particle physicists, who rue the day their funding body, the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC), merged with the vastly overspent Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC), which used to administer the country's large-scale science facilities.

The resulting Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) has spent a large chunk of its budget on projects such as the huge "Diamond Light" synchrotron in Oxfordshire, which uses particle acceleration to produce light for extreme magnification, letting scientists study materials at atomic level.

The project was well-named because it is expensive – and getting more so. The public accounts committee's recent hearing on Big Science heard that capital spending on phase II of the synchrotron is now forecast to cost an extra £20m. Worse, the estimated annual operating costs have almost doubled – from £24m to £46m.



Three members of the STFC, Prof Keith Burnett, Marshall Davies and Prof Richard Wade, are also non-executive directors of Diamond Light Source Ltd, the company that runs the synchrotron. Overlap between the two boards is understandable – STFC is the major shareholder in the joint venture company, which is also part owned by the Wellcome Trust.

However, none of the three lists Diamond in the STFC's register of interests, which requires the "declaration of any personal or business interest, direct or indirect, monetary or non-monetary, that may conceivably conflict with the interest of the STFC". Members list their involvement in numerous other projects, committees and academic departments that are funded by STFC. Given just how much extra funding Diamond is now getting, while other facilities face severe cuts, shouldn't their divided loyalties be listed? Meanwhile, the STFC is left with an £80m shortfall. It has already announced withdrawal from the Gemini Observatory partnership and the International Linear Collider project, while severe cuts to research grants will leave many physics departments struggling.

GANGLAND LONDON

Lawyers called to accountant

THE 12-year multi-million pound operation by police and MI5 to bring down the notorious Adams family crime syndicate has instead landed the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and four prosecution barristers in unprecedented controversy over plea bargaining allegations.

The final trial collapsed because the CPS refused a judge's request that the prosecution barristers give evidence to support their own case. Now a formal complaint about the conduct of the four barristers has been made to their regulatory authority, the Bar Council.

Last February, after four years of legal wrangling, the north London crime boss Terry Adams – whose empire was built on drug trafficking and gangland murders – struck a deal with prosecutors, pleading guilty to a specimen charge of money laundering. Judge Timothy Pontius jailed Adams for seven years and ordered him to pay legal costs of £4.7m.

That left his accountant, Terry Moffat, in the dock, facing charges of money laundering and fraudulent trading. Moffat always claimed he was used unwittingly by Adams. Last September the judge threw out the case against Moffat after he made extraordinary allegations about a plea bargain he said he had been offered by two of the four barristers, Andrew Mitchell QC and Timothy Cray.

Claiming that Cray said they knew he was "completely innocent", Moffat alleged that at a meeting on 13 December last year Cray had also told him: "I would love to defend you." During a second meeting at court on 6 February this year, he claimed Mitchell offered him a "soft conviction" in return for a non-custodial sentence.

But when Moffat said he would not agree to any bargain that did not clear his name, he alleges that Mitchell replied: "If we give you a clean bill of health, we want to know that you won't come after us."

Moffat argued that if the prosecution team thought he was innocent, it was an abuse of process and not in the public interest to force him to face a trial to prove he was not guilty.

The judge said that if Moffat's allegations were true, they were "serious and troubling". The more "disturbing and pernicious" of the two was the apparent willingness by the crown to drop the case if there was a guarantee Moffat would not sue the government, he said.

But to his "considerable surprise", a third prosecution barrister, Kennedy Talbot, said that Mitchell and Cray would not be called to rebut the allegations on oath or in witness statements. The CPS argument was that even if the comments had been made, they could not amount to an abuse of process.

Judge Pontius gave the prosecution two attempts to reconsider calling Mitchell and Cray to give evidence about what went on at any meetings they had had with Moffat. But the prosecution team declined and, sure enough, the case against Moffat was thrown out. It was an unhappy end to "Operation Trinity", which began in secrecy in 1995, cost tens of millions and led only to Terry Adams' relatively short sentence – which, incidentally, he is appealing.

Judge Pontius said the crown's decision not to rebut Moffat's claims on oath meant he could not assess whether the accountant was making malicious allegations to derail the trial.

Moffat has complained to the Bar Council's standards board about Mitchell, Cray, Talbot and a fourth barrister, Esther Schutzer-Weissmann. He alleged his prosecution showed "gross bad faith" and breached the Crown Prosecutors' and Bar Council codes of conduct. The four barristers said they were unable to comment because they were acting for the CPS at the time. But it is known that all four will contest the complaint.

A spokeswoman said that the crown's view was that "the defendant's allegations contradicted other facts to such a degree that the court could have no reason for granting the exceptional remedy of stopping the case". She added that the CPS "do not consider it appropriate to call prosecution counsel to answer unsubstantiated and uncorroborated allegations which can be made by any defendant trying to derail a prosecution."

IRAQ SECURITY

Baghdad's army

THE lack of fall-out from a recent shooting in Iraq shows the potential dangers of leaving Britain's presence in a war zone in the hands of private mercenaries.

As troop numbers reduce there will soon be more mercenaries in Iraq working for British companies than real soldiers. Yet the companies can hide mistakes behind commercial confidentiality. *Private Eye* has learned that the ArmorGroup, a private military company chaired by Conservative MP Malcolm Rifkind, was involved in an incident in November when a British employee guarding a convoy in southern Iraq shot and wounded an Iraqi general's driver. Iraqi employees guarding the same convoy denounced their British colleague as the culprit, accusing him of reckless shooting.

Iraqi forces reportedly considered banning the ArmorGroup from southern Iraq. The company confirmed an incident took place but gave no details on the shooting. A spokesman said: "A full investigation was carried out using Iraqi and Coalition Forces. An ArmorGroup employee was found at fault. After due discussions an apology was issued and compensation paid.

The employee concerned was dismissed. All parties expressed satisfaction and the issue was closed."

Though the culprit was sacked he faced no legal sanction, as foreign contractors cannot be prosecuted under Iraqi law by order of the Coalition Provisional Authority. Neither can foreign troops, of course, but they at least are subject to military law.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Contact sport

WHEN people think of investigative reporters meeting secret contacts, they recall the Washington car park where Deep Throat dished the dirt on Watergate, not the Jury's Inn, Milton Keynes.

Nevertheless, it was in this unglamorous three-star hotel that a part comic, but mainly sinister battle over the future of free reporting in Britain began in December 2006

Izale McLeod, then the star striker for the Milton Keynes Dons, was enjoying an engagement party in the Infusion Restaurant. By all accounts, it got out of hand. Sally Murrer of the *Milton Keynes Citizen* contacted a source in the Thames Valley police, who said that McLeod had been arrested after an allegation of GBH. Murrer ran the story and later reported that the charges had been dropped.

Murrer is a straight journalist from the old school; the mother of two young girls and the carer of a 20-year old autistic son. She can cope with her children and a job on the *Citizen* because she has contacts who have fed her with stories like the McLeod case for 33 years.

Proud of her work though she is, she would never claim to have broken earth-shattering exclusives. In April, for instance, she checked with a police source after a local man Doug Belcher was killed – apparently while fighting burglars who were stealing his van. "Didn't he serve a prison sentence in France in the 90s?" she asked.

"Yes, for supplying cannabis," replied her source. "And it ought to ring a bell because you wrote about it."

"Silly me," she thought, and dug out her old cutting.

About the time of Belcher's murder, a police contact also chatted to her about an Islamist fanatic who had been released early from prison even though he boasted about becoming a suicide bomber. It was background. Nothing could be written because a D Notice was slapped on the story.

Murrer's life seemed routine until she was shopping on 8 May and a colleague called to warn her: "The police are here. They're seizing your computer."

Detectives from the Thames Valley and Hertfordshire forces didn't stop there. They spent three hours searching everything, right down to the packets of Cup-a-Soup by the office kettle.

Eight officers then went through her home and removed bugs they had been using to tape her conversations with sources. They took her to Banbury police station and left her in a cold cell for 24 hours. By the end she was suitably bewildered and terrified, and ready for the interrogation.

Detectives didn't ask her about state secrets: they wanted to know how she had found out about Izale McLeod; who had reminded her about her old piece on Doug Belcher; and they also asked whether she could confirm that she had talked about a potential suicide bomber with a police officer but printed nothing.

Murrer was released but when she returned for her next interview the officers had a treat for her. "The first thing they did was strip search me. They took me into a side room and put the rubber gloves on. I started shaking. My brain went to cotton wool." They charged her with "aiding wilful misconduct in a public place" and warned her that she could go to prison for years. There's a committal hearing at Kingston-on-Thames magistrates court in February 2008, and a full trial is expected in the autumn.

A police officer who is due to retire was arrested along with her. His colleagues also arrested his son, who has fought for his country in Afghanistan and is due to go back for a second tour.

Allegedly he had some ecstasy tablets and had also tried to win the favour a pretty young reporter on the *Citizen*'s rival, *The Milton Keynes News*, by telling her about how a clueless copper had lost a complete set of keys for Milton Keynes central nick – including the keys for the custody cells. She ran the story, which was all over town in any event, and was duly interrogated by Thames Valley and Hertfordshire officers.

They have now spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on the Murrer inquiry. Originally it was a police corruption investigation: officers selling stories for money. But Sally Murrer isn't a high-rolling scoop-hound from the *News of the World*; she's a local reporter who has never paid for a story in her life.

Thames Valley clearly want to get the arrested officer. But what was personal has become political. If the police lose, they will have wasted hundreds of thousands on a fatuous and oppressive prosecution when the money might have been better spent on, say, monitoring ex-prisoners who threaten to blow up the transport system.

If the police win, it will become a crime for journalists to report what a police officer or any other public official tells them without authorisation – as will just talking to them and not even publishing what they say.

'Ratbiter'

See **Man in the Eye** *overleaf* ➤

EATON BE MERRY

WHAT glamorous lives estate agents lead! Or so *Evening Standard* readers may have thought as they perused "Diary of an Estate Agent" in the 5 December issue.

The author was one Michael Curness, managing director of Movingspace in Vauxhall, south London, but the star of the show was an unidentifed "colleague of generous proportions" who escorted Curness on his merry round. On Tuesday, for example, "the Large One and I set out to meet his favourite marchioness in her Kennington home…"

MAN IN THE EYE

KEVIN HALL

The corpulent charmer is in fact Kevin Hall – or, as he sometimes styles himself, Kevin Davidson Hall, a former Tory prospective parliamentary candidate who hit the headlines last year by defecting to UKIP in protest at David Cameron's Blairish tendencies. Until a couple of months ago he worked for the upmarket London estate agency Brompton Ltd. One Friday afternoon in October he left for the weekend, taking with him client lists and property particulars – and never returned.

By the following week he and Michael Curness had set up Egerton Roche, a classy-sounding agency with an address in Eaton Gate, SW1, and a website boasting that clients "have come to associate Egerton Roche with the provision of the very best" – no mean feat, given that it didn't set up shop until, er, October 2007. It specialised in "the most prestigious areas" such as Chelsea, Knightsbridge, Belgravia and Mayfair, with a team of staff who "walk down the best streets in London on a daily basis, Cadogan Square, Eaton Square, Eaton Place, Chesham Place… We think of these addresses as being 'our' streets."

Er, not quite. The address in Eaton Gate was a "virtual office", rather like a PO Box, from which mail was redirected to the real HQ in Kennington Lane, Vauxhall. And the expensive properties Hall and Curness displayed on the webpage were ones for which other agents – notably Brompton Ltd – had actually been instructed.

Brompton applied for an injunction, pointing out that Hall had signed a covenant which prevents him from poaching its customers for a year after his departure. A high court order issued on 14 November, which also obliged him to return all the files he swiped from the office, means that until October 2008 he can't have professional dealings with "any contact, client or associate" that he worked with at Brompton. Curness and his company are similarly banned from inducing Hall to break the order.

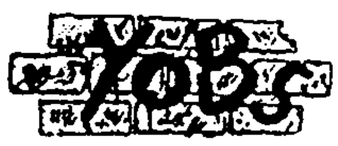
But has it already been breached? In the *Evening Standard* piece, published three weeks later, Curness describes himself and Hall visiting the marchioness, who is "a firm friend, and kind enough to recommend us to her large social circle". This lady sounds suspiciously like a (real) marchioness who is in fact a contact of the Brompton agency. Later in the piece, Curness boasts of finding a long-term let for the teenage sons of "a Middle Eastern client". From the details given, he sounds just like a man who is actually a client of Brompton. If Hall were really in touch with these people he could face jail, a fine or seizure of assets for contempt of court.

If it does come to that, the best defence might be to plead that it was all a Kevin Hall fantasy. For Hall's claims aren't always all they seem. Although he says he lives in a flat in Mayfair, this turns out to be a forwarding address. And what of his political CV? In a statement issued after his defection to UKIP last year he spoke about the general election of 2001, when he was supposedly a Tory candidate. "There is one thing you really need to understand," he had told his team at the start of the election campaign. "We don't have to win." This, he explained, was his way of letting them know that his "principles, values and this country's national interests were much more important than winning an election".

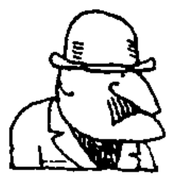
Noble sentiments – except that Hall didn't stand in the 2001 election. Although adopted as Peterborough's Conservative PPC in 1999 to take on the absurd Labour MP Helen Brinton, he resigned the candidacy in September 2000 just before the local association was due to discuss a proposal that he should be deselected.

The *Peterborough Evening Telegraph* reported that some local Tories doubted whether "the image he is portraying, including his choice of clothes, is the one they want for their Conservative candidate". (This was apparently a reference to his alarming habit of sometimes wearing a kilt in public, despite weighing almost 30 stone.) But Hall insisted he was stepping down purely to "dedicate more time to his property business".

Now that his property business has landed him in the high court, perhaps it's time for a return to politics. In a series of internet postings 10 years ago he aired his theory that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz and that Hitler was unaware of the slaughter of Jews. All this and more could be found in "a masterpiece" called *Hitler's War* by David Irving – and, Hall said, "I do not know of any of Irving's claims that have been disproven." Would even UKIP want him as a candidate now?



HUSBAND



In the City

A SERIOUS amount of total nonsense, especially from lawyers but also business leaders, much of it with a "British-is-best" xenophobic tinge, has been spouted in the weeks since the NatWest Three pleaded guilty last month in Houston to defrauding their employer of $7.35m. Listening to much of the comment, some from regular critics of the failings of the Serious Farce Office, it could be imagined that Britain leads the world in fraud prosecution and avoiding miscarriages of justice.

After David Bermingham, Giles Darby and Gary Mulgrew pleaded guilty, you might have thought that would have been that given that the British bankers were admitting they had done what they had been declaring since 2002 that they had not done – persuade NatWest to sell an offshore limited partnership investment for $1m that was worth several times more, and pocketing part of the difference. Their Enron co-conspirators, chief financial officer Andrew Fastow and his lieutenant Michael Kopper, conned them and took most of the $12.3m rest.

But no. Instead, their family and supporters denounced the plea bargain as not evidence of the bankers' guilt but of that of the US criminal justice system and its oppressive nature, which conveys innocent "suits" to prison – the reason the three men had fought extradition under an undoubtedly one-sided treaty. The trio's business allies – embarrassed by their u-turn – resumed their attack on the treaty and the Stalinist injustice somehow "proved" by the claim that over 90 percent of criminal cases result in guilty pleas. The inference being that innocent men were being pressured into pleading guilty to crimes they did not commit. Eighties Wall Street pirates Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken immediately come to mind as such "victims", plus, more recently, Conrad Black's right-hand man David Radler.

Well as the Americans say, let's look at the record.

Firstly the "innocence" of the three men who we are told have now pleaded guilty only out of convenience because, although they claim the case should have been brought by the SFO (who declined) as it all happened in London, they cannot afford a lengthy trial and want to serve their sentences in Britain. "The bare facts look horrible but we are 100 percent innocent and we know we can prove it when we are given the appropriate forum," Bermingham told the *Sunday Times* in 2004. Similar protestations of complete innocence continued right to the end.

As part of a plea bargain in the US Federal court system the defendant agrees a statement of facts confirming their admitted guilt. The NatWest Three signed such a statement. It runs to six pages. It confirms that meetings took place in Houston and New York with their Enron co-conspirators – so much for there being no US "venue" for the fraud. The three men agree that they "knew" they had concealed facts from NatWest and acted in breach of their duty. They accepted that Bermingham made suggestions and proposals to advance the fraud on their employer. The statement concludes: "But for the actions of the defendants, the right to realise proceeds from the residual interest (in the LJM Cayman partnership) would have belonged to NatWest. Moreover, the defendants were not entitled to receipt of any of the proceeds for their own account." Which is why they have also agreed to pay back the $7.35m.

The nine-page plea bargain begins by each defendant admitting that "he is pleading guilty because he is guilty" and that the statement of facts "are true and constitute a sufficient factual basis for his plea". Furthermore, the waiver of any appeal is "knowing and voluntary". He agrees that "there are no other agreements, promises, representations or understandings". Finally, his attorney states that the defendant's decision "is an informed and voluntary one".

But the US process also requires the defendant

☛ *See over...*

who has agreed to a plea bargain to stand up in front of the sentencing judge and not just admit his guilt but do so in incontrovertible terms and prove that he is doing so freely. Defendants are questioned as to why they did the deal, asked if there have been any secret threats or inducements and questioned as to their health, whether they are on any medication or anything stronger, drugs or alcohol, which could influence their decision. They are told that the court can reject the deal regarding any sentence agreed with the prosecution if it is too lenient.

No wonder, therefore, that none of the NatWest Three will publicly say that they are only pleading guilty out of convenience and are really innocent. If they did then Judge Ewing Werlein could throw out the plea bargains and say let's get it on at trial. But then the trio could risk more than the three years plus one day which is part of the plea bargain and face the five years provided for on the one count of fraud, concerning the transfer of the $7.35m to a Cayman bank account, to which they have pleaded – all served in the US.

To hear many of those who attack the US plea bargain system it would seem almost that guilty pleas in order to get a discounted jail sentence are unknown in Britain. In fact, most of the convictions obtained by the SFO are from pleas, not jury verdicts – 70 since 2001 compared with 52, or 57 percent of the total.

But these do not involve deals about sentences because British judges do not like to lose the power to decide jail time. However, they do have to give a discount of up to 50 percent for a plea, which is a big incentive. How different is that from Texas law?

The power of the plea bargain is graphically illustrated by the President's Corporate Fraud Task Force, set up in 2002 post-Enron. It has obtained over 1,200 convictions in five years, including 214 chief executives and presidents, 53 chief financial officers and 23 corporate lawyers. The SFO tally in that period is 122 convictions.

In Enron, the Justice Department charged 34 defendants. It has now obtained pleas from 18 and convicted four more. Just two defendants were acquitted and three had convictions overturned on appeal. Two cases were dropped, five await possible retrials. Nine of those who pleaded guilty did jail time with a maximum of six years. Former Enron chief executive Jeff Skilling was jailed for 24 years on conviction. Kopper was given the same sentence as the NatWest Three, 37 months, plus handing over $12m. Fastow, chief mechanic of the fraud, was jailed for just six years in return for his testimony against Skilling and others. The SFO would not have achieved such results in that time; it only in October convicted Michael Bright of Independent Insurance, which collapsed six months before Enron, in 2001.

The SFO would like to have the same powers that persuaded the NatWest Three to cut a deal – something the *Eye* always predicted would happen once they arrived in Houston, despite their protestations of innocence. The ability to roll-up defendants along the corporate food chain by cutting deals in return for testimony against superiors or partners explains much of the US success. David Radler's deal to testify in return for a lenient sentence enabled prosecutors to indict Conrad Black, even if his testimony was of less value in the conviction than the videotape of Black removing evidence. Radler will do 29 months in jail, Black six and a half years.

But British defence lawyers believe that the plea bargain policy which is so successful for the Feds will never work here without two major changes. Firstly, greater certainty that a prospective defendant will be charged and if charged convicted. At trial, the SFO has only won 52 convictions against 123 defendants (a 42 percent success rate) since 2001. So why would anyone rush to roll over when they might not be charged, and, if so, have a fifty-fifty chance of getting off? Few US fraudsters get acquitted.

The other advantage held by US prosecutors is the big stick of heavy jail time. Skilling and Bernie Ebbers of WorldCom are doing 24 and 25 years; John and Timothy Rigas of Adelphia Communications 15 and 20 years – Michael Rigas drew 10 months' home confinement after pleading guilty. Money manager James Lewis was jailed for a maximum 30 years last year. The heaviest whack for fraud in Britain is still 14 years. Most fraudsmen receive under the seven years given to Michael Bright. So the bargaining chip of a much shorter sentence is greatly reduced. And, lest we forget, playing the SFO is a gravy train for lawyers, win or lose. Plea bargains are far less remunerative.

Does anyone really believe that the NatWest Three would have pleaded guilty if they had been tried here? They wanted the SFO to have their case because they believed they had every chance of beating the rap. Especially as they might not have faced the evidence of Kopper and Fastow. They would also have had all sorts of "abuse of process" style get-out-of-jail cards. The truth is that had they pleaded guilty in 2002 when first indicted, they could have cut a deal to testify against Kopper and Fastow and by now be at home having probably never seen the inside of a US jail. But they chose to play the US system and believed they could beat extradition. Once first Kopper and then Fastow rolled, the prosecutors did not need them anymore.

The NatWest Three could have been many millions better off in legal fees had they done that first deal back in 2002. Now they have paid the fees and still have to repay the $7.35m.

The SFO is awaiting a report from former New York prosecutor Jessica de Grazia on how it can improve its game. Most observers believe it can't do so without fundamental changes in the law, sentencing and the attitude of judges.

Meanwhile, an example of how much remains to be done. Almost a year ago the SFO launched an investigation into corruption by British companies involved in the Iraq oil-for-food scam. It will cost over £20m and take three years. Last month, American prosecutors obtained their seventh guilty plea. They have also obtained three further civil settlements, the largest from oil group Chevron for $30m.

But at least in one area there is change. The deal done in Houston last week, whereby three British executives pleaded guilty to price-fixing on marine hoses in return for being sentenced in Britain for also breaching the Enterprise Act, could see similar joint US/UK prosecutions in the future. The next example could be the fuel surcharge case against British Airways executives expected to be brought in the new year by the Office of Fair Trading.

"Get rid of the elves and stop giving away presents"

LEADING management consultants Accenture could face some embarrassing revelations as a result of a civil claim launched in New York by a former global managing partner for technology, Rosemary O'Mahony. She left last year after working for the former Andersen Consulting since 1978, most recently in Paris. She now lives in London. O'Mahony accuses the Bermuda-based Accenture of a "fraudulent scheme to evade the payment of millions of dollars of social security contributions that were due to the French government".

O'Mahony claims that Accenture evaded paying French social security contributions for fulltime expat staff like her who were working in France more than five years. The payments should have totalled 36 percent of their earnings. In her case alone she alleges that the non-payment totalled $3.7m from 1997 to 2004.

She alleges that from 2001, she repeatedly raised the matter with senior US executives of Accenture. Her claim states "these executives informed Mrs O'Mahony that Accenture had deliberately decided not to make these payments and had deliberately decided to conceal from the French authorities the fact that she was working in France". Accenture tax experts, she says, decided that its interests would be best served by not making any of the French contributions and concealing that she was working in France.

She claims that in retaliation as a result of her complaints she was demoted in 2004 and suffered a reduction in salary of $670,000, which she is claiming as compensation.

Accenture is contesting the case and seeking to have it dismissed. The firm is expected to deny the allegations vigorously if it goes to trial.

GOOD to see Michael Ashcroft combining his business and political interests in his latest investment – £2.1m for a 21 percent stake in AIM-listed Arc Fund Management Holdings. A director of Arc is Tory MP Henry Bellingham, whose 9,180 majority in North West Norfolk will not need the support of deputy party chairman Lord Ashcroft's fighting fund.

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

I ADVICE YOU TO STICK THE LOT IN SOME GRUBBY LITTLE ISLAND TAX HAVEN
CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANCY
ACCOUNTS Y/E 2001
MY DEAR BOY— I BANK IN THE CITY OF LONDON.
OH! SO YOU'VE ALREADY DONE IT!
CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANCY

OBN

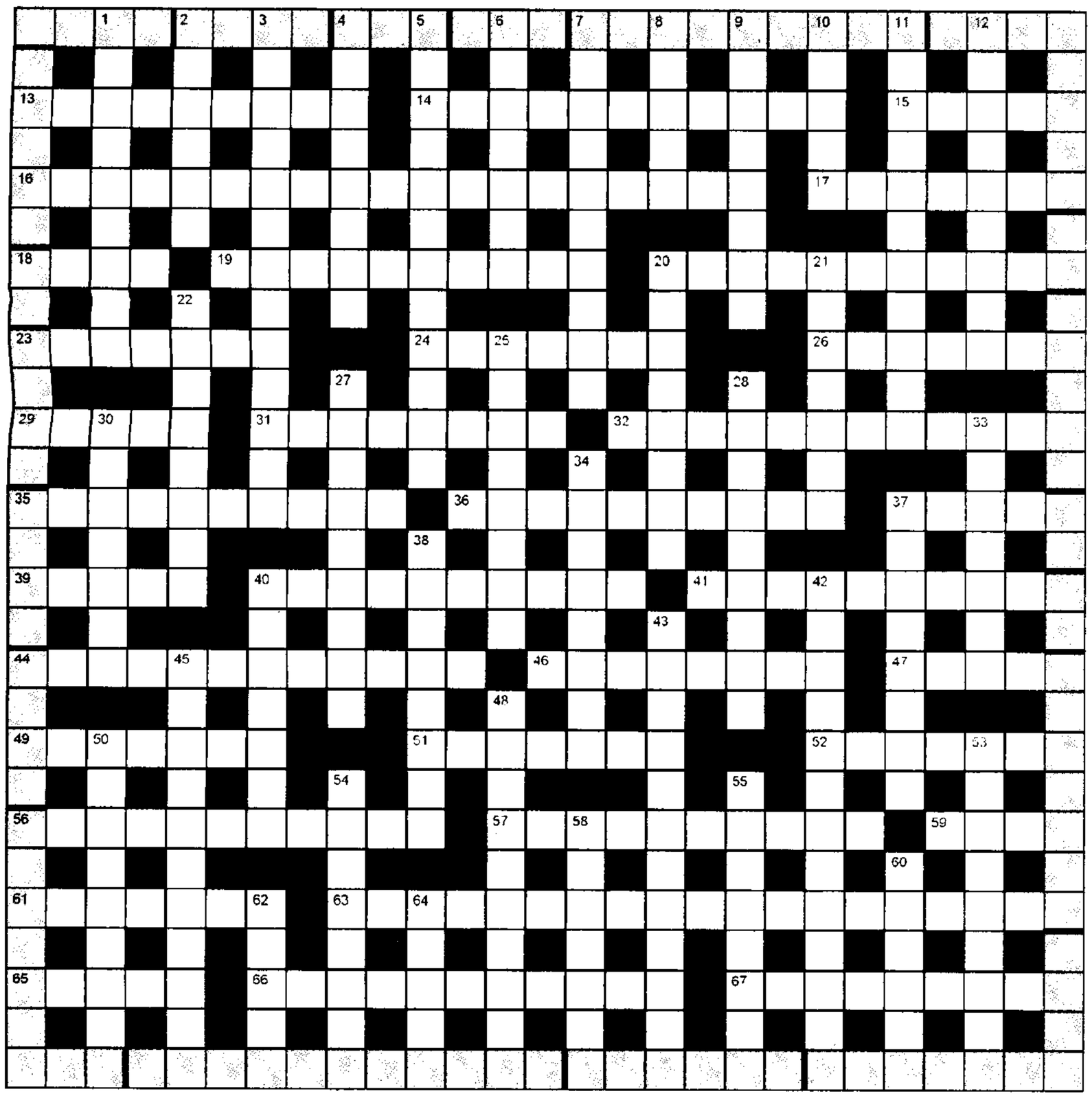
"My faith in Gordon Brown's ability and integrity is undiminished. Indeed, I have only two complaints about his premiership. The first is that it began too recently and the second is that it has not yet exorcised the ghosts of Blair and Blairism...".

ROY HATTERSLEY, ***Guardian***
Submitted by Diane Jenkins

EYE CROSSWORD 355

£250 PRIZE

by Cyclops



Starting at the top left square, running clockwise round the edge of the grid, is an extract (slightly modified) from a quote featured in Pseuds Corner in 2007. (It praises a tipple for being the equal of the musical performance to which it was drunk). One clue, lacking a definition, leads to the perpetrator's identity. 56 letters of the quote not intersecting with clue answers are:
A A A A A B B B B C C C C D D D E E E E E E E E H H I I I I I K L L L N O O P P P Q R R S S S S T T T T T U U W W Y

ACROSS

13 Lubrication-applier (includes VAT) and a fuel container (3-6)
14 Private Eye will, before skirt is put on Ian Hislop? (Nicely curvaceous) (4-7)
15 Bound to give head to Brenda (5)
16 Spectator would do so with article: "Brown *initially* cosying up to conservative wing – don't despair!" (4,2,3,6,4)
17 Super being next to man – got tumescent (7)
18 Pull Jerry Hall, for instance? (4)
19 Fellatio rings which come with audio players? (10)
20 Crafty Cyclops taking piss endlessly, turned girl against love – Malay one? (11)
23 Flighty thing helps provide quickest relief (7)
24 Maxwell, initially, before throttling in exasperation a director (7)
26 Ex-BBC commentator, plonker, getting the bird (4,3)
29 Dick, topless, is a hot piece! (5)
31 Slash but stop pinching end of todger! (8)
32 Bangs on about Conservative routine that's tedious (5,7)
35 Familiar name for the old Prince of Wales, 'Big Ears'? "One initially goosed out bedtime companions" (5,5)
36 You'd be dead unlucky to see him wielding his "implement" (4,6)
37 Phwoar! Females undo tops in this holiday spot (5)
39 It's given a hammering when one takes Swedish girl rearwards (5)
40 Figure an affair is about right with corporate protection (4,6)
41 Revolutionary lout coming over Victoria's top is absorbed by the shuddering (10)
44 DIY OBN material? (4-8)
46 Tongue of opera diva over quivering hams (8)
47 Beat heartless object of great affection (5)
49 Satirist gets journalist/broadcaster hard – not good (7)
51 Yiddish drag helps PC to adjust (7)
52 Big-bodied swimmer is one to fumble around Ursula's opening (7)
56 Not speaking on popular good, out of order PC-wise (appealing to the undiscerning) (7,4)
57 Copulate roughly covering lady's extremes in essential oil (10)
59 Sweet thing, our Brian's one-time indulgence (4)
61 Transport the Northern sheep-shagger by road (7)
63 Not to be taken seriously, like the disciplinarian pro associated with Hitchcock film (8,3,3,5)
65 Beeb head must go: ensure there are no strings attached (5)
66 Appear to have a shag with kinky Israeli (11)
67 50% cross-dresser, à la foreign state (9)

DOWN

1 Mad to include old record "Love-in" score for direst of dire song entries? (3,6)
2 *Private Eye* has a page about Dirk? (6)
3 Polish thief would do this, possibly, to keep off the booze? (4,3,6)
4 Dicks needing vents to accommodate blow-job (8)
5 One group of politicians put down sad Archer – not right, doctor brought in (5,7)
6 Sort of light, Henry with nothing on mounts bloke, butt out (7)
7 Arse nibbled by Southern bod – a good and bad thing (7,3)
8 Snotrag utilised internally – animal! [unusual spelling] (5)
9 What the Pope gives induce shakes in hospital (8)
10 In and out they go, drawn between couples (5)
11 Millionaire Stone has point on chopper (11)
12 Old flame has to breathe heavy taking in length and discharge (9)
20 Gold dealer sadly has nothing for one like nipples? (8)
21 Tooth is stuck in firm todger's end after intense nooky starts (7)
22 Accommodation for flood victims – two blokes, the Navy's pride and joy (3,5)
25 Corrupt or no, most of Conrad's work? (8)
27 Recognises Bill Clinton's first to take on Commies (sex involved) (9)
28 Catch whore with Hardy – a nice turn-up for the books (3,6)
30 Harry's bottom electrified after erection (7)
33 Dog has row about boob (7)
34 Remove member and one has to undergo change, holding in pee (8)
37 Response when Conservative's leader moves to no.1 spot: "It's an act of God" (8)
38 After tabloid goes arse up, Ron is madly camp (8)
40 Stomach immense – reduce by a quarter, that'll flatten it (4,3)
42 Tend to have Jack as well as Jill behave promiscuously left and right (5,4,4)
43 Makes fleshpot care about where he might get laid for possibly the last time? (6,2,4)
45 Feeler put out about Brown's second wish getting dashed – fair thing? (6,5)
48 "Invalid means of getting round wife, Charlie," he snapped (5-5)
50 Casting off shackles Cyclops's up and able to indulge in demanding sex positions? (9)
53 Make kids call girl "Fashion" (9)
54 He daubed sore tits with agitation (8)
55 When thrown up latte reportedly contains frothy fare? (8)
58 Bump into London Olympics champion gobbling up Herb (7)
60 Torturer applies muscle to druggie (6)
62 Country's come to have a new leader (5)
64 Bucolic river next to Gents not popular (5)

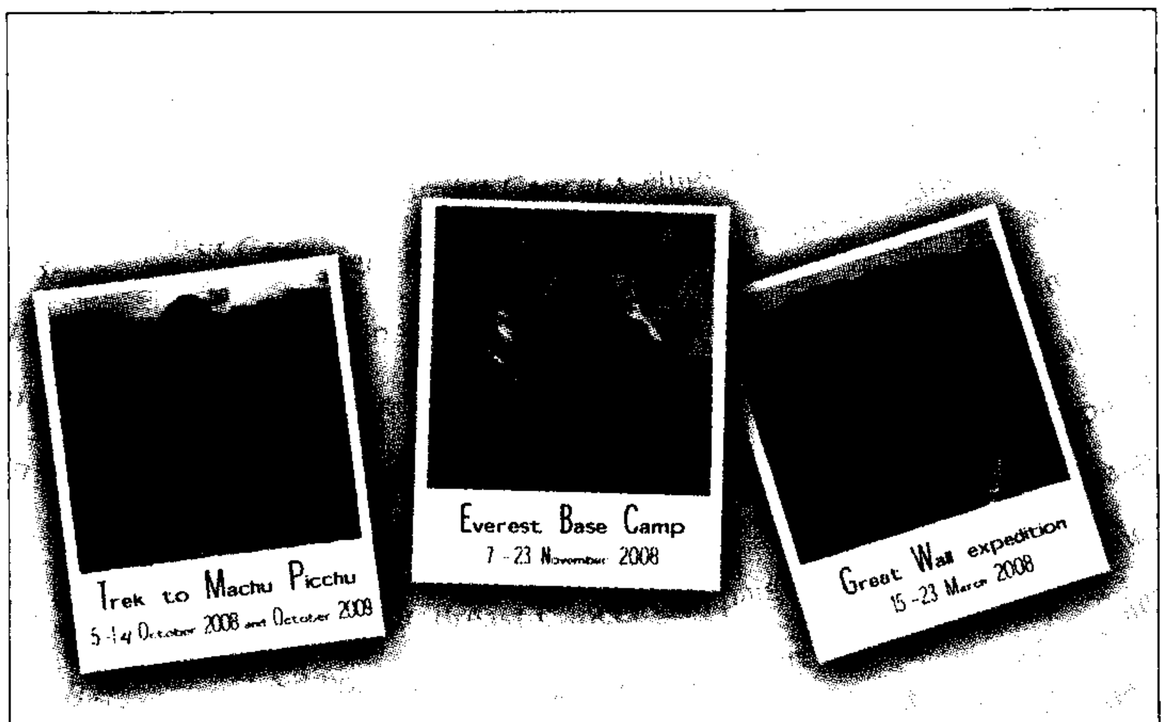
£250 prize to first solution opened on 04.01.08. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. Or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

Solution to Crossword No. 354

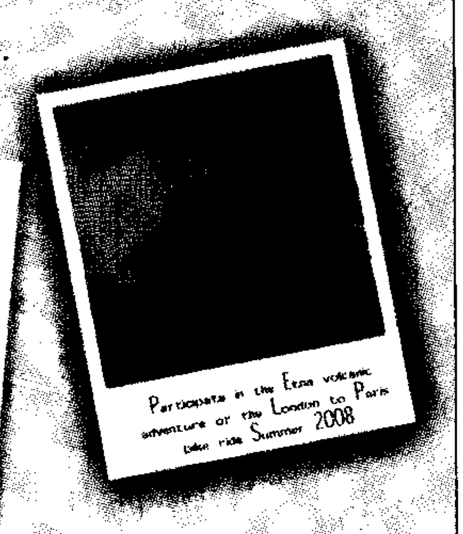
Winner: Valerie E. Stanley

ACROSS: 8/21 Get your leg over 9 Abridge 10 Specs 11 Scrounger 12 Sarcasm 13 Redwood 15 A week in politics 18 Bladder 23 Screwball 25 Bosom 26 Excreta 27 Consort.

DOWN: 1 St George 2 Gobsmacked 3 Pressman 4 Fairer 5 Urdu 6 Adagio 7 Hebrides 8 Gases 14 Doing a bunk 15 Ambushes 16 Oil slick 17 Invasion 19 Africa 20 Reagan 22 Remit 24 Woes.



2008 CHALLENGE with Breast Cancer Campaign



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- John Addison took up the challenge with Breast Cancer Campaign

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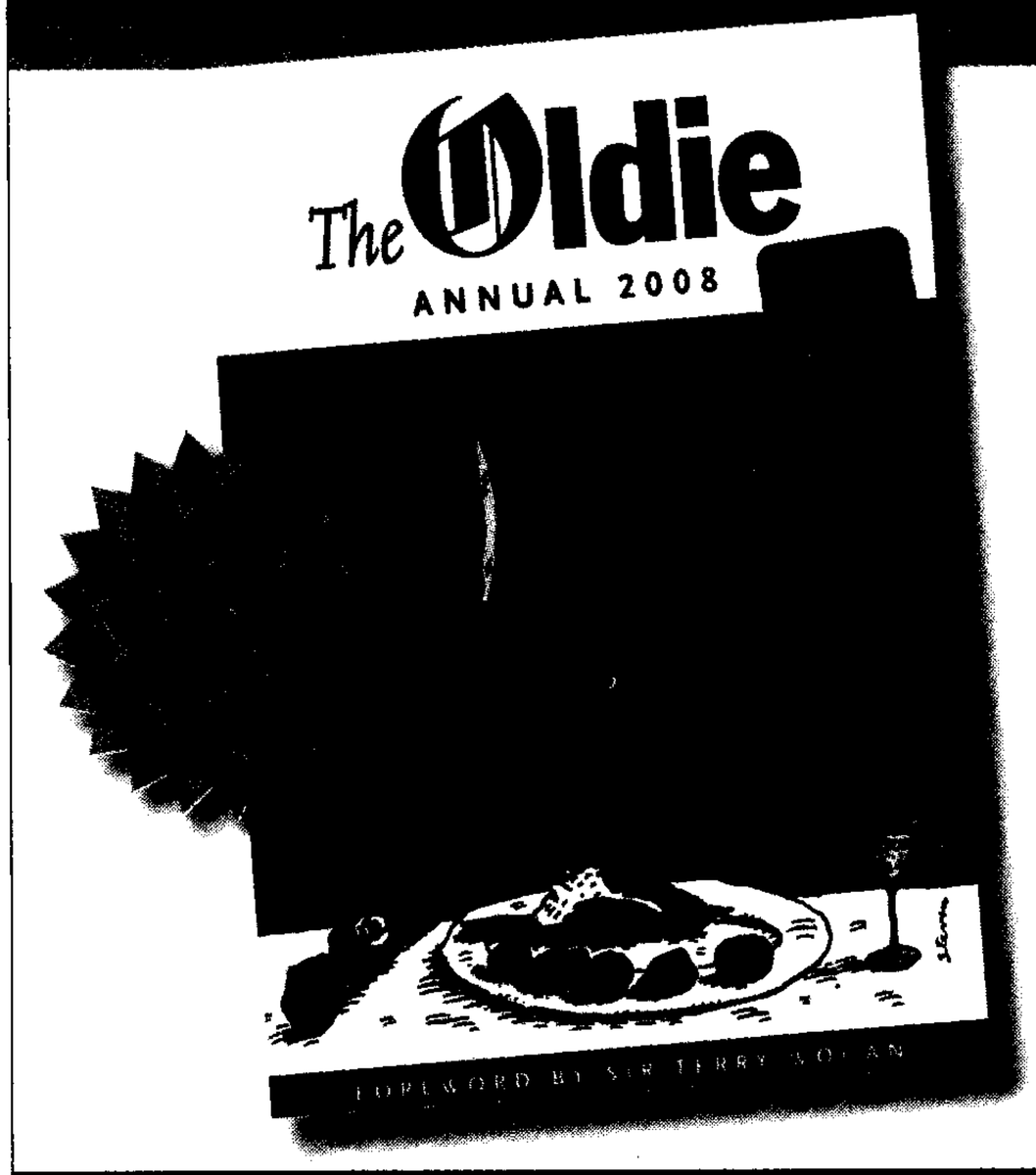

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quoting Private Eye

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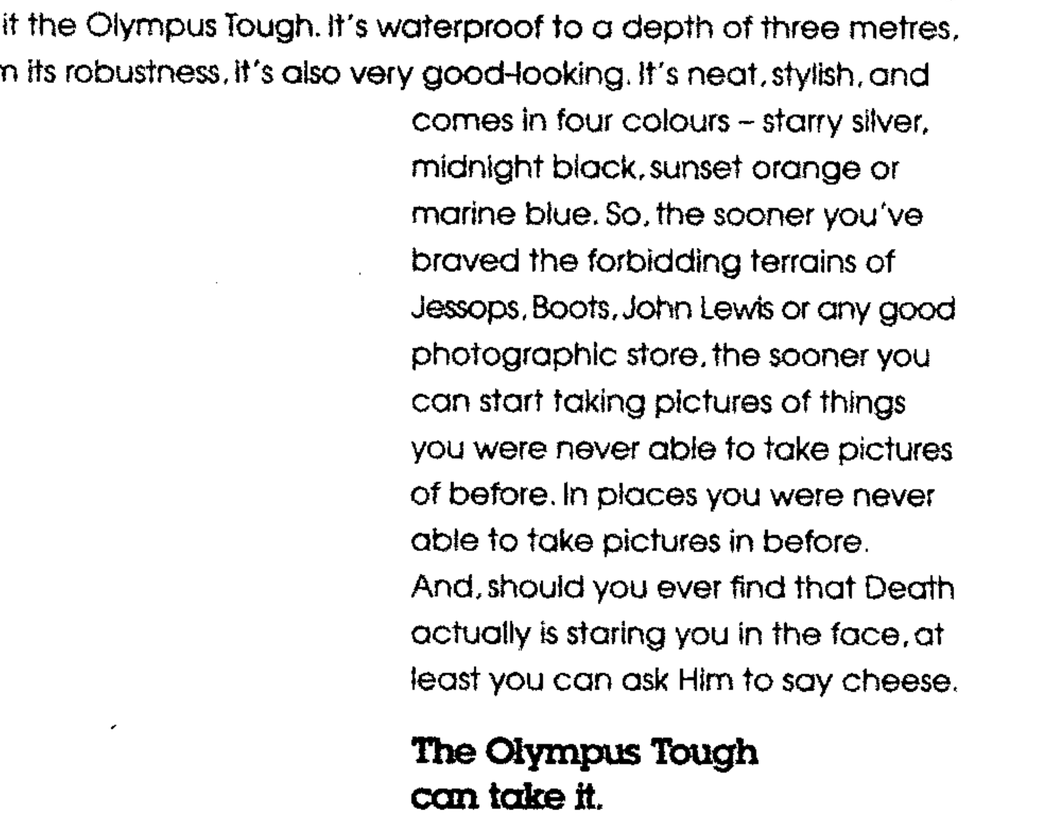

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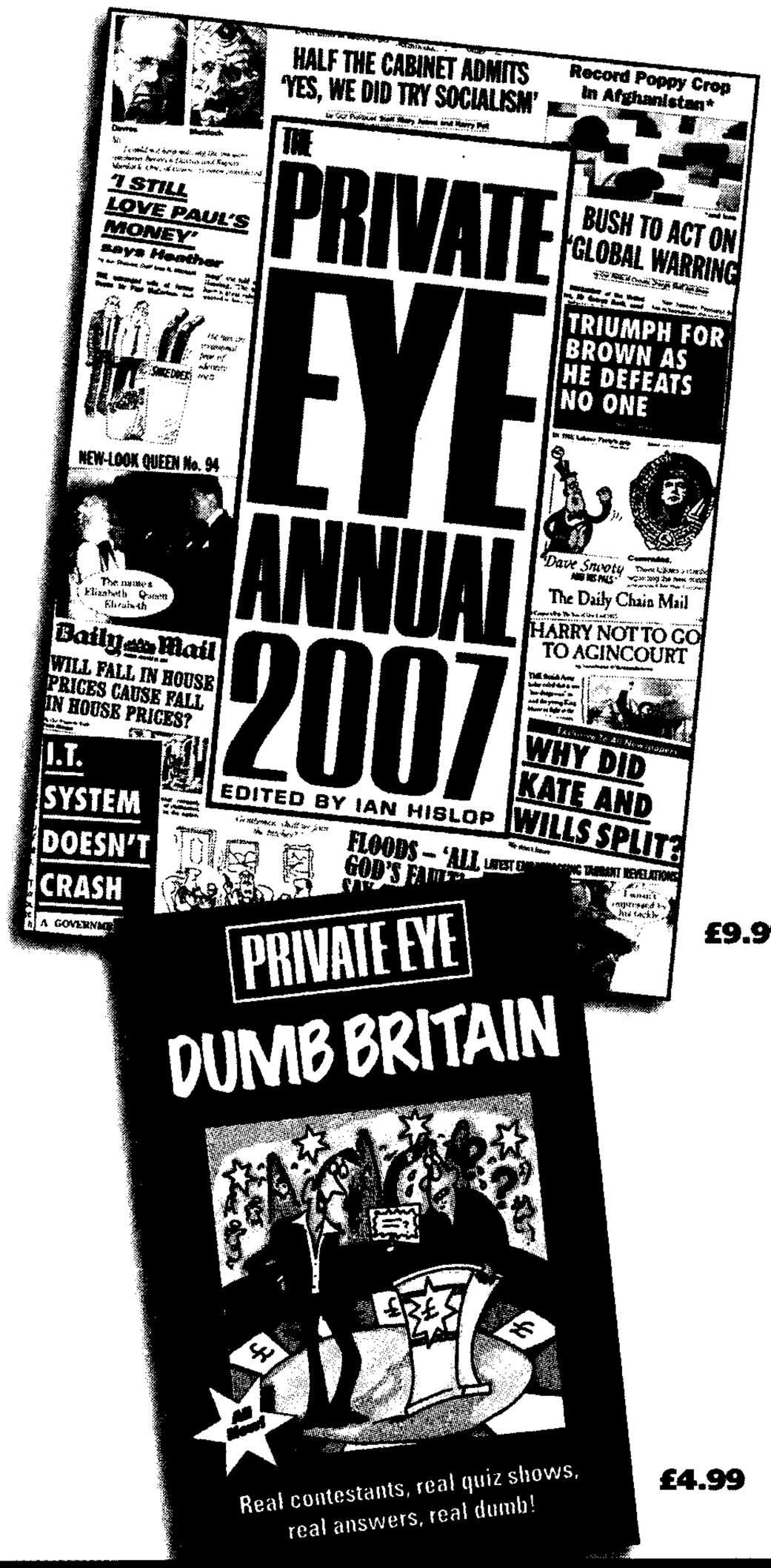
HALF THE CABINET ADMITS 'YES, WE DID TRY SOCIALISM'
Record Poppy Crop in Afghanistan*
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'I STILL LOVE PAUL'S MONEY' says Heather
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Daily Mail
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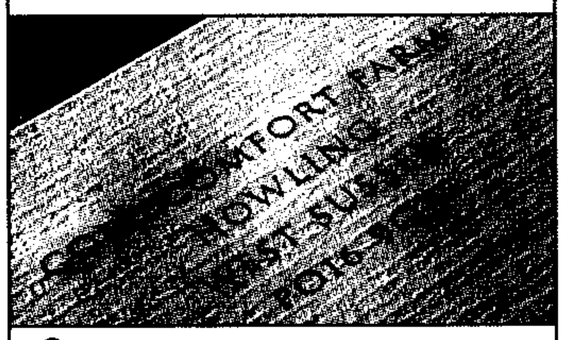

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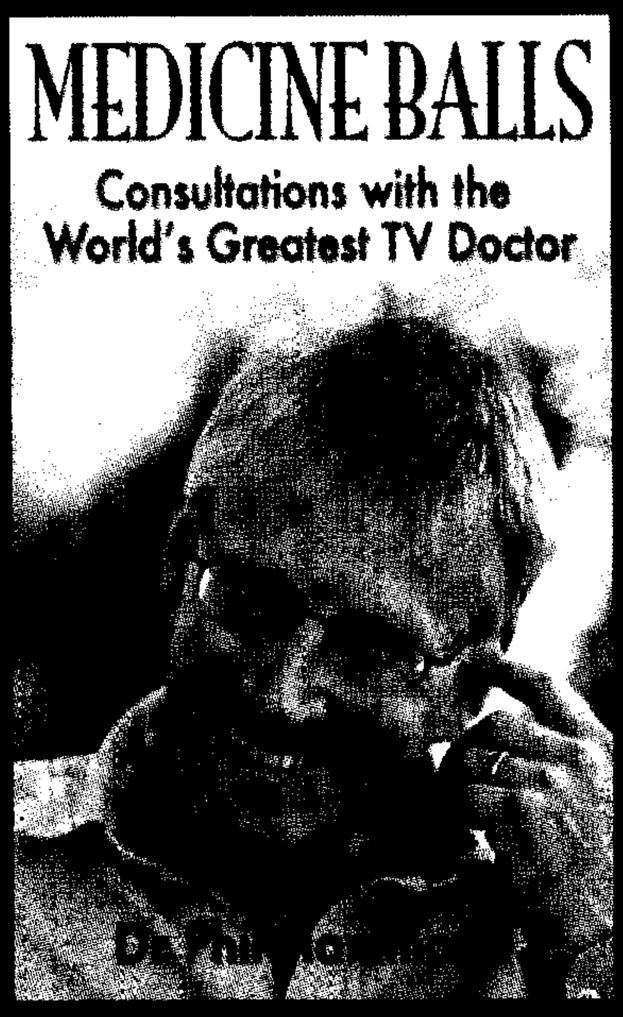

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